" LAST EXORCISM "

IVANWOOD

FADE UP FROM BLACK:

"If you believe in God, you believe in the Devil."

Underneath the title we hear an old woman SCREAMING.

FOUND VIDEO FOOTAGE

The reality of exorcism. The reality of the horror of exorcism. The danger. A woman screaming while Korean exorcists hold her down... News reports: Tampa about two years ago. They did an autopsy. Turned out she had a neurological disorder... In 1995, a Pentecostal minister in San Francisco pummeled a boy to death trying to drive out his demons... 1997, this was a Korean Christian congregation, a woman was stomped to death in the church basement. She'd been hearing voices....

PULLOUT TO REVEAL:

INT. COTTON'S OFFICE - DAY

A man in his forties (COTTON MARCUS) petting his dog, watching this on TV. Shakes his head in disgust.

MOMENTS LATER

Cotton goes through an old stack of newspapers.

COTTON (O.S.)
Exorcisms are dangerous business. If you don't know what you're doing, somebody may end up dead.

Cotton holds up a photo of an exorcism. It looks like a vidcap.

COTTON (cont'd)
This was a 17-year-old girl in Upstate N.Y. Her mother ended up suffocating her with a plastic bag. Mother was only doing what was best for her child, of course. Destroying the demon inside her.
(shakes his head disgustedly)
These people, they've seen all the movies with people throwing up green pea soup so they think they can cast out demons. It's a big game. Then they put themselves on YouTube and the craziness just spreads. We've seen an explosion the last few years... then you turn to the front page and you see this...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Cotton holds up a newspaper. A headline about the Pope bringing back the Rite of Exorcism.

COTTON (CONT'D) (cont’d)
Pope Benedict reopens the Vatican’s exorcism school. To train priests to go forth and do battle with Satan. The Pope, right? This is somebody a few people listen to.

FADE UP TITLE:

THE IVANWOOD EXORCISMS

EXT. SUBURBAN MINIMALL - DAY

A minivan pulls into the parking lot. Cotton steps out of the car and mutters to himself.

COTTON
Hot as hell out here.

A documentary camera trails him into the mall. He holds the door open for them to enter.

INSERT TITLE: **Reverend Cotton Marcus is a fourth generation evangelical minister. In May 2006, a documentary film crew set out to capture his final days as a man of God.**

INT. MAILBOX USA - MOMENTS LATER

Cotton waits on line.

COTTON
I bet the person who started this company made a mint.

Cotton retrieves a package from his mail box, looks at it for a second then holds it up to the camera.

COTTON (cont’d)
Interesting.

We see an EXTREME CLOSE UP of the handwritten envelope. It's addressed to "Reverend Cotton Marcus", and is also marked, "Please Open Right Away".

COTTON (cont'd)
Usually people contact me through the website.
(re: package)
Old school.

EXT. MINI-MALL - MOMENTS LATER

Cotton heads back to his vehicle.

COTTON
I’m contacted every day by desperate people. They’re getting foreclosed on, they just found a porno mag under Johnny’s bed, Little Maggie is projectile vomiting and speaking in the Seven Tongues of Belial- it’s a rich tapestry.

EXT. COTTON’S HOUSE - DAY

Cotton's van is parked outside a modest ranch house.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Cotton plays Texas Hold'em with wife FIONA and their son LEWIS (11).

COTTON
And now the flop.

Cotton flips over three cards.

FIONA
I fold.

COTTON
Lulu?

Lewis has a hearing disability and speaks with a distorted enunciation.

LEWIS
Don’ caw me that.

COTTON
I'm sorry.
(British accent)
Lewis.

LEWIS
All in.

Lewis pushes all his chips into the middle.

COTTON
You're not supposed to bluff every time.

LEWIS
Do I tew you how to play?

CONTINUED:

Cotton grins at his son's precociousness, and pushes chips into the middle.

COTTON
I'll call. What do you got?

Lewis turns over his cards. He's a card away from a flush.

LEWIS
(mock preacher mode)
Please Jesus give me a diamond.

Cotton flips a card. It's a heart.

LEWIS (cont'd)
Shit.

COTTON
He failed you again.

CLOSE ON:

A photo of an eight year old boy, LITTLE COTTON MARCUS, dressed in a three piece suit. We hear a scratchy recording of a radio broadcast...

LITTLE COTTON (V.O.)
I don't know why the Lord has chosen me, but he has. One morning, I was sitting in the bathtub and God came to me and told me to put away childish things. It was my destiny to wrestle with the Serpent...

EXT. COTTON'S HOUSE - EVENING

Cotton sits with his son, leafing through a binder of old photos and press clippings.

COTTON
I used to tell people, "God came to me in the bathtub". It was my dad's idea to say that. He gave me a script.
(Deeper voice)
Do the script exactly as it's written and don't get cute.

INSERT PHOTO:

COTTON AND HIS DAD

CONTINUED:

COTTON (cont'd)
But you know what? Sometimes the stuff I was ad-libbing was even better than my dad's stuff.

LEWIS
I want to be a child evangelist.

COTTON
You do?

Lewis cracks up. Shakes his head.

COTTON (cont'd)
Probably for the best. You want to have a chance at turning out normal.

Cotton smiles wistfully to himself as he turns another page.

COTTON (cont'd)
Here... Junior's first exorcism.
(shows page to camera)
I developed my own style as I went on. No fire and brimestone. More contemporary. My father knocks it as "new age." Or nuage. Pronounced like sewage. But I can slip back and forth as called upon...
(booming old testament voice)
Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee!
(back to normal voice)
Whatever's appropriate to the clientele I'm dealing with at the moment. You gotta give the customer what he wants.

MOMENTS LATER

Cotton is looking through the childhood photos of him and his father. More somber. Lewis is gone.

COTTON (O.S.)
It's because of him. That's why I'm doing this. It's because of Lewis... I don't want him being raised by a liar.

INT. LEWIS' BEDROOMS - LATER

Cotton tucks Lewis in.

CONTINUED:

COTTON (O.S.)
When he was born, it was touch and go for a while. He was three months premature. I never prayed harder.

HALL -- MOMENTS LATER

Cotton leans against the wall, arms crossed.

COTTON
And he was okay. They told us he was going to be okay. Then they told us he'd have at most ten percent function in one ear, none in the other. And I remember so clearly I had two thoughts- one: I'm the luckiest man in the world. My boy's gonna live. Two: it's just that-- luck. Blind luck.
(smiles, shakes his head)
This would not have been a revelation to *you*, necessarily.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Fiona does dishes while Cotton dries.

KITCHEN -- LATER

Fiona talks directly to the camera.

FIONA
When Cotton first told me he was going to come clean in this documentary I was a little nervous. But then he explained why he wanted to do it... I think this could be a good thing for our family... I hope.

LATER:

Cotton and Fiona are seated at the kitchen table. Cotton is opening the envelope from the mailbox store.

COTTON
They always say the same thing. "Reverend Marcus, I turn to you because I've tried everything..." Verbatim. It's like they all got the same template or something. "Tried everything" you quickly find usually did not include going to the doctor for a check-up.
(reading)
He can spell. That's more than I can say for most of 'em.
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

COTTON(cont'd)

(skimming the rest)
Devil, God, Devil, God... Ah, dead livestock. The guy’s a classicist... oh, and here, here we go-- paragraph three: “I have tried everything” Want to zoom in on that?
(continues reading)
Oliver Sweetzer. Ivanwood, Missouri.

Cotton looks up.

COTTON (cont'd)
Can I help this guy? Maybe give him some piece of mind. Maybe. But I’m deceiving him... It’s a dance you do. In your head. My father is a true man of faith so the dance was always easy for him.

Cotton looks lingeringly troubled by the question.

JUMP CUT TO:

COTTON (cont’d)
I’m a charlatan. A con man. Whatever word you want to use. Mountebank. That’s a good one. They should bring that one back- *mountebank.*

Fiona just shakes her head to herself.

COTTON (cont’d)
Which is not to say I ever harmed anyone. I know damn well I helped a lot of people. There are people out there who are so outside the realm of ever seeking psychological help, who just would have no concept of psychotherapy or anything like that-- who’ve in fact probably only seen Jews on TV.

Fiona playfully elbows Cotton.

COTTON (cont’d)
Who’s going to help those people? Me. Or, God forbid, somebody else.

EXT. COTTON'S HOUSE - MORNING

The sun rises over the house.

INT. COTTON'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Cotton hustles his son down the hall.

CONTINUED:

COTTON
Rise and shine... Let's go, sport.

LEWIS
It's da day of rest. Can't I ressssst?

INT. CAR - DAY

Cotton and family are riding through town.

COTTON
We're going to Grandpa's.

LEWIS
I don't waaaant ta go ta Granpa's.

COTTON
You have to.

LEWIS
It's not fair.

COTTON
Life is not fair.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Cotton and family park their car in the parking lot.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

The modest church is one quarter filled but completely focused on the minister, EARL MARCUS (seventies).

EARL
Today we have something different for you. One of the holiest men I have ever come upon in my life. And I'm not just saying that cause he's my son. Ladies and Gentleman of the congregation, Reverend Cotton Marcus. Praise Jesus.

LATER:

Cotton is at the pulpit doing a card trick. A live projected image behind him shows the theatrics of his hands. Cotton lays out the Ace of Spades.

COTTON
The devil is a liar and the Prince of Lies. That’s what we’re told. But do we know how his lies trap us? ...Is it the allure of a pretty face?
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

COTTON(cont'd)

(turns the Ace of Spades into the Queen of Hearts)
Is it the seduction of power?
(makes the King of Diamonds appear)
Is it the simple desire to look good in the eyes of our neighbors?
(makes every face card appear at once, fans them out)
Or is it the lies we tell ourselves? Is that how he gets inside us?

Cotton waves his hand over the cards. They all turn into the Ace of Spades.

EXT. EARL'S HOUSE - DAY

Earl hosts a barbecue. Cotton mans the grill while Fiona plays with the kids. Earl watches the camera with a wary eye.

EARL
What is this about anyway? This motion picture.

COTTON
It’s about whatever they get.

EARL
You know they can edit this anyway they want and make you look like some kind of smacked ass.

COTTON
They can do whatever they want. I got nothing to hide. What about you?

Earl just smiles.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

As he is filmed from a distance, Earl is now unaware of the camera and noticeably less stiff.

EARL
Why don't you come by more often? Your mother....

COTTON
I know it.

EARL
I got a light week coming up. What do you say we take the kids fishing together?

CONTINUED:

COTTON
(a bit distantly)
That’d be nice.

EARL
You don’t gotta jump up and down.

Cotton smiles. There’s a bit of an awkward moment between them. It’s clear neither one of them likes silence. Cotton waves Lewis over.

COTTON
Lewis, do your dance.

The kid does a crazy little dance, some kind of eight year old white boy version of krumping. Earl claps, smiles proudly. Lewis keeps his act going a little too long...

COTTON (cont’d)
That’s enough, son. When you strike oil, quit drilling.

Cotton playfully roughs Lewis’ hair.

INT. EARL'S HOUSE - LATER

Earl takes a large ancient looking book out of a closet and sets it on the table. The leather binding has been worn smooth. The pages are yellowed and beginning to flake.

EARL
This is a family heirloom. Our ancestors were men of God all the way back to the old country. They were true believers every one of them.

Cotton flips through the pages, revealing elaborate drawings of evil looking creatures.

COTTON
The *Malificus Malifucarum.* The Witches’ hammer. You got every demon, devil and goblin accounted for in here.
(reads from the book)
Nasmarious, Prufalas, Separ, Valefar... The idea is you can't exorcise a demon until you identify it.

EARL
No one else has a book like that.

COTTON
It's really beautiful.

CONTINUED:

EARL
(re: the cameras)
You’re bringing them along?

COTTON
That’s the idea.

EARL
You know what you’re doing?

COTTON
Probably not.

EARL
Just be careful, son.

Cotton looks at his father wondering in what sense he means that warning.

EXT. COTTON'S HOUSE - DAWN

The sun rises over Cotton's house.

EXT. COTTON'S HOUSE - MORNING

Cotton packs his car and hugs his kids. Fiona hands him a small cooler bag.

FIONA
Can you swing through Briar on the way back?

COTTON
Sam's Club or Costco?

FIONA
Whichever. I'll text you a list.

Cotton gets in his car and pulls out of the driveway. Fiona waves goodbye. Lewis runs back into the house.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

Cotton drives past a sign that says "Welcome to Louisiana."

INT. COTTON’S VAN - DAY

Cotton shakes his head regarding the economically blighted landscape they’re passing through.

COTTON
I always find myself driving this same interstate.
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

COTTON(cont'd)

Which, I guess, is about as surprising as the fact that Alien Intelligences always choose to reveal themselves to alcoholic illiterates in overalls.

OUT A SIDE WINDOW--

A factory is destroyed. An excavator works through the rubble, clearing the debris.

INT. COTTON’S VAN

COTTON
Nothing brings out devils like hard times. This is prime possession country all through here.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

Cotton brings his suitcase into the men's room.

COTTON
Can't fight any demons without the costume... Wish I was a Catholic so I could wear one of those collars.

INT. GAS STATION BATHROOM - DAY

Cotton changes into his preacher suit. A black suit, dark tie.

COTTON
Ministering can be quite a rush. The love the congregation gives you is incredible.
(sighs)
At least I’m going out in a blaze of glory.

JUMP CUT TO:

Cotton is fixing his hair in the mirror. A beat--

COTTON (cont’d)
I'll probably go back to school, take some classes. Maybe real estate. If I can sell a house half as well as I can sell the Lord, I should be okay.

INT. COTTON’S VAN -- DAY

The camera puckishly pans from a a cheesy real estate billboard out the side window to a profile view of Cotton at the wheel.

EXT. IVANWOOD STREET - DAY

Cotton parks and gets out in the center of town. It's a one block main street, with only a couple of store's still in business.

With a wry smile, Cotton notes an open bar and directly across the Second Cavalry Church. This week’s sermon: “Apocalypse Now?”

COTTON
Bars and churches. Pick your poison.

JUMP CUT TO:

Cotton approaches a SLIGHTLY OVERWEIGHT WOMAN smoking a cigarette outside her thrift store.

COTTON (cont’d)
Hi. I'm trying to get to Oliver Sweetzer's place...

SHOPKEEPER
Sweetzer?

COTTON
You know him? Supposed to be off Zief road but reality and Google don’t seem to be matching up.

SHOPKEEPER
That happens. Especially around these parts.

JUMP CUT TO:

The woman is giving long and complicated directions. Cotton thanks her, starts to move on. The woman seems to not want to let the conversation end that easily--

SHOPKEEPER (cont’d)
You know, Zief road’s going to take you right through what was the slave quarters when this was all one plantation. Lester Thibedoux, he was the second attorney general of Louisiana. It was his plantation. He was the supposedly a relatively kind slave master.
(off Cotton’s smile)
I know it’s kinda relative.

A local wanders into the shot. Shopkeeper waves to him and the local backs out.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHOPKEEPER (cont'd)
His first wife, you know, was a second cousin of Andrew Jackson...

INT. COTTON'S VAN -- DAY

Cotton is driving. Shakes his head, smiling.

COTTON
One thing people don't lack for around here is stories. Everybody's got a tale to tell.

EXT. GAS STATION

Cotton is pumping gas. He nods politely as a fellow MOTORIST holds forth--

MOTORIST
Yeah, it was right on this highway here. Though most of the killings I believe happened further south, down past the 90. The victims were mostly truck drivers sleeping in their rigs...

EXT. IVANWOOD STREET--

Cotton, map in hand, listens to an elderly TOWNSPERSON.

TOWNSPERSON
...Over a dozen Federal Marshalls fired over six thousand rounds. Some of the houses on that end of town, you can still see bullet holes in some of the walls. When I was a boy, you'd still find shell casings in the street. We'd pick 'em up...

INT. COTT0N'S VAN

A stoned-looking SPINDLY MAN is leaning in the car window, like Cotton had asked for directions.

SPINDLY MAN
You go up Telegraph road about five miles, there's an unmarked dirt road, you follow that a ways, you come to a clearing with a stone circle. That's a Magik circle. A witch's circle. They celebrate black masses up there. They have for years. Generations. People'll tell you that's an old well or something. Uh uh.

EXT. IVANWOOD STREET

Cotton talking to that loquaicious shopkeeper--

SHOPKEEPER
She drowned the baby with her own hands, then went in her room and drank Maxxo which was like a caustic cleaning agent of the era.

INT. COTTON'S VAN

Cotton is driving, craning his neck.

COTTON
We'll find it eventually.

INT. COTTON'S VAN -- MOMENTS LATER

THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD--

A PICK-UP TRUCK is coming down the road in the opposite direction. Passes them.

A moment later, Cotton sees in the rear view...

COTTON
Looks like this guy's turning around.

The camera shoots out the back window. The young man at the wheel of the truck TYLER (18) seems to be waving them over.

COTTON (cont'd)
Ok, let's see what this is.

EXT. COTTON'S VAN

Cotton gets out as the young man hops down from the truck.

TYLER
How you doin'?

COTTON
Well enough. A little lost.

TYLER
Yeah?

COTTON
Is this the road to Oliver Sweetzer's place? Do you know?

CONTINUED:

Tyler comes closer, studying Cotton-- and the camera-- with evident amusement.

TYLER
You planning on makin’ a movie up there?

COTTON
Sort of.

TYLER
Sort of? I was wonderin’ what you were doing on this road.

COTTON
So this is the right way? You know the Sweetzers?

TYLER
No, sir, this is not the right road. What you’re gonna want to do is make a u-turn right up here. Go right back up the road the way you came and keep going till you get to the interstate. OK?

COTTON
Ok.

TYLER
Then you just keep going.

Cotton now knows he’s getting jerked around.

COTTON
Yeah?

TYLER
Yep. That’s it. You just keep going.

Cotton throws a look over at the camera, heads back.

COTTON
Well, thank you very much.

TYLER
No need to thank me. Just get your ass back in your vehicle and get movin’.

INT. COTTON’S VAN -- CONTINUOUS

Cotton eyes the rear view as he starts to drive away.

COTTON
Yeah, he’s real cute.

CONTINUED:

TRACEY (O.S.)
Did he threaten you?

A rock loudly BANGS against glass. As the camera whips around, we get a glimpse of a startled young woman (TRACEY the director/producer/sound-person.)

TRACEY (cont'd)
What the fuck?

The young man-- views through the rear windshield throws another rock. This one bounces off the trunk.

Cotton floors it before the young redneck can fire another one off.

INT. COTTON'S VAN -- MOMENTS LATER

Cotton shakes his head, keeping one eye on the rear view mirror.

COTTON
(amused)
Son of a bitch.

TRACEY
Is he following us?

COTTON
I don't see him.
(sees something ahead)
Is that it? Is that the house?

A bit in the distance: A FARMHOUSE. A large, worn, structure. Surrounding it are a barn and other utility buildings.

EXT. FARMHOUSE -- DAY

Cotton approaches the house. A farmer, OLIVER (50s, robust) emerges from the house.

COTTON
Mr. Sweetzer?!

OLIVER
Reverend Cotton?

COTTON
Yes.

The kid in the pickup, is racing towards them.

CONTINUED:

COTTON (cont'd)
Um, we might have a problem, this kid here attacked us down the road.

OLIVER
Attacked you?

COTTON
With a rock.

OLIVER
That's my son.

COTTON
With a rock. He attacked us.

Oliver looks angry. Oliver's son, TYLER, pulls up behind Cotton and gets out. He glares at Cotton and then stalks toward his father.

TYLER
What the hell are you doing, old man?

OLIVER
You stand down now, boy.

Tyler lowers his voice as he gets closer to his father. We hear "superstition... goddamn circus... fucking cameras." Oliver winces at the swearing, then notices the camera.

OLIVER (cont'd)
Can you put that movie equipment away please?

EXT. PORCH - DAY

Father and son argue loudly in the b.g. as Cotton approaches the camera.

COTTON
It's sounds like there's some misunderstanding.

EXT. PORCH - DAY

With the camera at a comfortable distance away, Cotton talks to Oliver. The radio microphone attached to his collar picks up the sound.

OLIVER
I appreciate you making your way up here, but...
(re: crew)
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

OLIVER(cont'd)

...having all these others here just doesn't seem right.

Oliver looks cautiously at the crew.

COTTON
If you want me to tell them to leave I will. My number one concern here is helping you and your family.

Oliver nods.

COTTON (CONT'D) (cont'd)
I understand what you're going through right now, my friend.

Oliver grows confused.

COTTON (cont'd)
Your heart might not be open right now to help others.

OLIVER
Excuse me.

COTTON
I just mean your child is your obvious priority, but I have to tell you, you have an opportunity here to help thousands, maybe millions of people. That is -- if you were to let us move forward with our project.

OLIVER
What is your project?

COTTON
There’s only one project, isn’t there? Bringing as many people to Jesus as possible.

OLIVER
Your filming this is going to bring people to Jesus?

COTTON
That’s my hope. That’s my prayer.

JUMP CUT TO:

Oliver sighs, nodding. Obviously starting to give in.

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

Oliver stands in front a chalkboard teaching his 13 year old daughter, NELL. A stack of textbooks piled in front of her.

OLIVER
Europe is a very old beautiful place and there's a lot of things to see there.

NELL
You never went. Why should I?

OLIVER
I'm not saying you should. But if you do, you might want to find yourself comfortable with the metric system.

Nell takes out a pen and readies herself to take notes.

OLIVER (cont'd)
You have millimeters, centimeters. You've heard of those things right?

NELL
Yes.

OLIVER
Today we're going to work on converting those measurements into inches and feet. Do you know what system inches and feet are a part of?

NELL
The English system... What about cubits? What system are they a part of?

Oliver beams with pride. Cotton is impressed.

OLIVER
The cubit is a biblical measurement. It's a length of your hand to your elbow. But we don't really use that much today.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

Oliver walks through the property with Cotton at his side.

COTTON
Home schooling must be hard.

CONTINUED:

OLIVER
It is. I wanted to give Nell a more Christian education without all the outside influences. Tyler went to the public school and he was exposed to a lot of bad things there. That’s where I started to lose him.

COTTON
Temptation is all around us.

OLIVER
I got to do right by Nell.

COTTON
It looks like you're doing a fine job.

OLIVER
I let the devil get inside her. How is that a fine job?

COTTON
(confused)
Excuse me.

OLIVER
I wrote you about the demon.

COTTON
I thought it was you who had been....

OLIVER
No. It's Nell... You have to help her.

COTTON
I prefer not to work with children.

OLIVER
I'm desperate.

Cotton shakes his head. Oliver grabs his arm.

OLIVER (cont’d)
Please.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

Cotton leans against the house.

COTTON
I don't feel comfortable doing this.

CONTINUED:

TRACEY (O.C.)
So what's your concern?

COTTON
It could be dangerous.

TRACEY (O.C.)
Dangerous how?

COTTON
She’s just a kid. Young minds don't always respond well to suggestion.

TRACEY
So dangerous in terms of your fearing being exposed?

COTTON
It just doesn’t seem like a good idea all the way around.

WOMAN’S VOICE (O.C.)
If you walk away now, what will happen to the girl?

That question seems to make an impression on Cotton.

INT. FARMHOUSE - LATER

Oliver brings Cotton some tea.

OLIVER
In the beginning she was just having nightmares. But it's gotten worse.

Cotton pulls a notebook and pen from his pocket.

COTTON
Go ahead.

OLIVER
Like I mentioned in the letter, our livestock's been going down.

Cotton nods.

OLIVER (cont'd)
First was Annabelle, then Jingo went down, and then Rocky. Each killing more brutal then the next.

COTTON
Are you sure it’s not a jackal?

CONTINUED:

OLIVER
It’s not an animal.

COTTON
How do you know?

OLIVER
Jackals eat the whole animal.

INT. BARN - DAY

Cotton and Oliver stand over a DEAD COW in bloody hay.

COTTON
This is quite a mess.
(Re: blood)
Rocky?

OLIVER
Yes. Last night. It always happens during the night.

COTTON
(skeptically)
Nell did all this?

OLIVER
Yes.

COTTON
Is it possible that maybe someone else could have done it? Maybe someone is upset with you.

OLIVER
No.

COTTON
But did you see her do it?

OLIVER
No.

COTTON
Is she strong enough to do something like this?

OLIVER
A person possessed by a demon can have supernatural strength.

COTTON
Of course.

CONTINUED: (2)

OLIVER
Right.

Cotton examines the slash marks.

COTTON
It doesn't hurt to have a sharp knife either.
(beat)
Do you have any proof she did it?

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

A bloody night dress hangs from a clothesline. Nell washes sheets in a basin. The water is crimson from the blood.

OLIVER
Is it going to come out?

NELL
I think so.

OLIVER
(to Cotton)
She wakes up covered in blood.

Cotton approaches Nell.

COTTON
Nell, I'm going to need to ask you a few questions.

NELL
Yes, sir.

JUMP CUT TO:

Cotton pulls out his pad to take notes.

COTTON
Do you feel like there's something bad inside you?

NELL
I do, sir.

COTTON
What do you feel?

NELL
Like I’m going to hurl. Sometimes I get really hot.

CONTINUED:

COTTON
Do you feel warm in your cheeks?

OLIVER
She's been having high fevers.

Cotton looks up at Nell and studies her face. He reaches out towards her...

COTTON
May I touch you?

Nell nods. He gently grabs one of her earlobes.

COTTON (cont'd)
What do we have here?

He places a hand on the back of her neck for a moment and shakes his head ruefully. As if detecting the presence of something bad.

COTTON (cont'd)
(to Oliver)
I need you to bring me a basin. Fill it with water.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Oliver fills a tub with water.

INT. PORCH - MOMENTS LATER

Cotton talks to the camera as he digs through his bag for something.

COTTON
Did the girl really do that to those animals? Maybe. Being brought up with this kind of isolation, getting your superstition with your mother’s milk, it does odd things to the mind. I’m living proof of that.

Smiles as he grabs something and slides it into his pocket.

CUT TO:

Cotton removes Nell's socks and places her feet in the basin. Tyler is in the background watching closely. As soon as her feet touch the water, it starts boiling over. Nell screams.

NELL
My feet are cold!! My feet are cold!!

CONTINUED:

COTTON
It's okay honey.

Cotton turns to Oliver.

COTTON (cont'd)
I need to talk to the girl alone.

Oliver hesitates for a second, then leaves the room. Now alone with the girl, Cotton employs a more sincere approach.

COTTON (cont'd)
You don't have to do this if you don't want to.

Cotton seems to be looking for a way out.

NELL
I want to, sir.

Cotton sighs, nods okay.

EXT. FARM - SUNRISE

Cotton takes out a duffle bag, and produces the ancient textbook. He opens a small spice bottle filled with a gray substance.

He shakes the contents of the bottle on to the book creating a dusty affect.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - LATER

Standing with Oliver on the porch, Cotton produces the ancient book. He opens the pages, releasing dust into the air. Oliver is impressed.

COTTON
The demon's name is Abalam. He is one of the king's of Hell and was most famously summoned up by Rasputin over in Russia where he brought down the whole royal family over there.

OLIVER
I heard of Rasputin.

Oliver begins to take comfort as he is finally getting some answers.

COTTON
"We fight not enemies of flesh, but principalities and kingdoms of the air."

CONTINUED:

Cotton sets down the book in front of Oliver. He turns it to a page that he's marked.

COTTON (cont'd)
There's only one demon that affects the inner temperature of the body. That's this demon, Abalam.
(beat)
The book says the power of this demon waxes over a lunar cycle...

Cotton puts on a pair of glasses and begins reading.

COTTON (cont'd)
Suus iucunditas est polluo viscus... His pleasure is to defile the flesh of the innocent.

OLIVER
And Nell, my child is the innocent?

COTTON
Yes.

OLIVER
What can be done?

COTTON
(reading further)
The demon has to be cast out or-

Cotton looks at the text, acting very concerned.

OLIVER
What does it say?

He runs his finger along the words.

COTTON
Vas of Abalam's phasmatis must exsisto iuguolo pro fructus vigeo.

OLIVER
What does that mean?

Cotton closes the book dramatically. Oliver is in agony.

COTTON
Once a person has the evil of Abalam inside him, the only salvation is death...

CONTINUED: (2)

OLIVER
(panicked)
Oh my God.

COTTON
...unless the demon is cast out by a servant of the Lord.

OLIVER
You.

COTTON
(firmly)
I can exorcise this demon.

Oliver wipes a tear from his eye.

COTTON (cont'd)
You okay?

OLIVER
No.

Oliver gets up, mumbling. Walks away, so as to avoid crying. Cotton addresses the crew.

COTTON
This is good. At some level he’s realizing his daughter’s “possession” is really his own craziness coming home to roost.

Cotton follows Oliver, motions for the crew to stay back.

JUMP CUT TO:

OLIVER
I keep Nell pretty close these days, but there were periods in where I wasn’t as watchful as I should have been... My wife was bedridden for quite a long while. She had the cancer. Pretty bad. I sort of checked out of the whole deal. The world, I mean. But then, after my Marcy passed, I woke myself up. I said I gotta raise these kids right. I let ‘em go to Sunday school at Second Cavalry for a while. But even that didn’t seem right. I just decided I wanted to keep ‘em close... I thought I did pretty good, but there musta been some door or window I left open somewhere.
(straightens his spine)
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

OLIVER(cont'd)

But I don’t blame myself. That’s how the devil works, getting you to second guess yourself.

Cotton places a hand on Oliver’s arm.

COTTON
Your daughter is going to be just fine.

Oliver nods solemnly.

INT. DEN - LATER

Cotton stands next to Oliver as he counts out a wad of money.

JUMP CUT TO:

Cotton is pocketing the money.

COTTON
Services rendered.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

Cotton walks across the field towards Tyler who's working a tractor.

Tyler notices Cotton. He shuts down the machine and smiles. Waves Cotton over. Cotton warily approaches the kid. He holds up his hands to show he means no harm.

COTTON (cont’d)
Why the warm welcome when we drove up?

TYLER
I don’t like the idea of a preacher sniffing around my family.

COTTON
I’m just trying to help.

TYLER
With magic tricks? I saw you slip something in that basin. What was it? Alka seltzer?

Cotton pretends like he doesn’t hear Tyler’s question.

COTTON
It seems to me there's no problem between us, Tyler. It’s between you and the Lord.

CONTINUED:

TYLER
(laughs)
The Lord and me got an understanding. We just kinda stay outta each other’s way.

COTTON
Well, maybe you and me can work out the same deal?

TYLER
Sure. You put on your little show, take the old man for his money, I don’t give a shit-- just know anything happens to Nell, anything at all, I’m gonna come after you with more than a rock.

COTTON
You don’t believe she’s possessed?

Tyler smiles cagily.

TYLER
There’s a lot of dead animal’s around here. I guess a demon’s gotta eat.

COTTON
It doesn’t seem like something your sister would do.

TYLER
I'd say you might be right about that.

COTTON
Well, you and your dad aren’t getting on so well. I think you might be messing with him a little. Am I right?

TYLER
Nope.

COTTON
Then who?

Tyler thinks carefully before he answers.

TYLER
The old man, himself.

COTTON
Why would he kill his own animals?

CONTINUED: (2)

TYLER
When he isn't drinking he's one thing. When he is, he's another. He's more beer than blood.

JUMP CUT TO:

Oliver’s appearing over the ridge. Tyler turns on the tractor so it roar drowns out his father as he drives away.

INT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

Nell sits on the love seat in the living room, hands folded in lap, as Tracey helps Cotton get a playback monitor working. Oliver stands by.

OLIVER
We used to have a TV. The cabinet’s still in the rumpus room. I’ve been thinking of making something out of it. Maybe a curio or something.

They get the playback working. Cotton jokingly high-fives the camera man.

MOMENTS LATER

Cotton, away from the others, addresses the camera.

COTTON
I told Oliver this was preparing Nell for what she might face but it’s priming the pump, basically. Planting the suggestion of what’s going to be expected of her during the ceremony. I do this with everyone, but I thought it was especially important with her-- as culturally isolated as she’s been. She needs her lines fed to her a little more.

MOMENTS LATER

Footage from what looks like an Italian rip-off of “The Exorcist” plays on the monitor. Horror images of a possessed woman writhing and cursing, eyes rolled back in her head.

Nell’s reactions to what she’s watching register in subtle tics on her youthful face.

EXT. CAR - DAY

Cotton unloads the trunk of his car.

CONTINUED:

COTTON
Show time.

He pulls out a drum and beats it lightly.

COTTON (cont’d)
It's all about the trance.

Cotton puts on a dark hood, with eyes cut out over his head.

COTTON (cont'd)
I probably won't need to use this. This girl is ready.

He returns the hood to his trunk.

EXT. BACK OF FARMHOUSE -- DAY

Cotton sizes up the field as a location.

COTTON
This is perfect right here. The fires against the sunset...

He faces the sinking sun. Contemplative.

COTTON (cont’d)
An alcoholic father blames all his problems on the supernatural, infects his daughter with his fears. So you use the supernatural to make the bad things go away. There is some sense in it. That’s why I was able to stay in this game as long as I have. You can do some good. Not permanently. The bad things’ll return. In one form or another. But maybe this little magic show buys them some peace of mind for a while. For a while anyway.

MOMENTS LATER

Cotton takes a knife, slices open a package of foot warmers.

COTTON
I put in some time as a missionary in South Africa. In the village where I was, there was a witch-doctor named Olofi. He was a cool old guy.

Cotton begins slicing them into small pieces.

CONTINUED:

COTTON (cont'd)
One day I caught him concealing tadpoles in his cheek right before he went to suck the pain out of this woman who was saying she was cursed.

Cotton removes a crucifix from around his neck, and takes the top off revealing a hollow core.

COTTON (cont'd)
I asked him, "aren't you ashamed of yourself?" And he says absolutely not-- "There are lies that tell the truth."

Cotton inserts the foot warmer material into the cross.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

Cotton is arranging a series of fire pits in a circle.

COTTON (O.S.)
"Lies that tell the truth." That's what all art is. Shakespeare, Michelangelo, name it. It's all the same dodge. Even documentaries.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Oliver is hunched over the bathtub, filling it with water. Nell sits draped in a towel, waiting to get in.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

As the fire pits blaze in the background, Cotton reads a fly fishing magazine.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Oliver brushes Nell's hair.

EXT. FARMHOUSE -- DAY

Cotton practices his routine to himself, his voice undulating in a haunting rhythmic way.

COTTON
Get down, demon. Get down on your hands and knees before God and pray forgiveness for what you have done to this family.

LATER:

CONTINUED:

The real ceremony is taking place. Oliver and Tyler stand on the outer edge of the circle, Oliver in formal clothing. Tyler looks uncomfortable. Oliver’s eyes are closed tightly, head bowed. He sway heavily to the sound of Cotton's voice. Nell lays on a plank, writhing in pain.

COTTON (cont'd)
...praaaay forgiveness for what you have done to this family.

OLIVER
Amen!

COTTON
Raise your hands, my daughter.

Nell lifts her arms to the sky.

COTTON (cont'd)
Oh Lord please give me the power... Oh yes give me the power to take the devillll from this girl and return it to Hadeeeeeess. To send it back into its grave. Oh Yes. Keep it from here! This is a place of tranquility, beauty and God!

Nell begins to thrash on the table. Oliver sways with the rhythm of Cotton's voice.

COTTON (cont'd)
It is time Lord to let yourself be known, here on the Sweetzer farm. We feel your cleansing spirit, now purrrrrge the demon! Now Lord! Now! Now! Now!

Cotton grabs Nell's wrists and presses hard with his thumbs. Nell screams.

CUT TO:

COTTON AT HIS VAN EARLIER

Cotton holds up two thumb rings.

COTTON
These are called “serpent bites.” They help bring people who are on the brink of their own enlightenment into a final spiritual upheaval. I've seen people vomit or speak in tongues or even orgasm from these.

CONTINUED:

He places the rings on his thumbs, then demonstrates how they attach to wires that run up his hand, into his coat and down into a pocket where they are attached to a 6 volt battery.

COTTON (cont'd)
With the proper cues to their senses you can take people on quite a ride.

BACK TO:

Nell writhes in Cotton’s grip.

COTTON (cont’d)
Help us Lord! The serpent won't let go of this poor girl. If you won't have it, let me take it unto me and let me...

Suddenly Cotton tenses. His body twitches. He lets the girl's hands go. She rolls, collapsing to the ground in a heap. Oliver runs to her side.

Cotton lays on his back, still twitching wildly.

OLIVER
Oh God.

Nell opens her eyes. Oliver runs to her side. Cotton lays motionless to the side, looking almost dead. Tyler is concerned. He runs to Nell.

TYLER
You okay, Nellie?

Cotton rolls slowly upwards. As Oliver and Nell hug, Cotton looks on satisfied.

OLIVER
Where is it? Where is the demon?

COTTON
It's gone.
(beat)
It could not get into my heart.

Cotton reaches underneath his shirt and pulls out the hollow crucifix -- suddenly he drops it, gripping his hand painfully. It lies on the ground, steam billowing out.

Oliver touches it and notices the heat. It freaks him out.

OLIVER
Oh my God. Oh my God.

CONTINUED: (2)

COTTON
The Lord was here today protecting all our souls.

INT. NELL'S ROOM - NIGHT

Nell sleeps soundly. Oliver pulls a blanket over her.

OLIVER
That took a lot out of her.

Half asleep, Nell opens her eyes and looks around groggily.

NELL
Am I better?

COTTON
Everything is going to be just fine.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Oliver and Cotton sit down for the coffee. Oliver bows his head, emotion slowly overtaking him. Cotton reaches out to him. They hug in a deep embrace. Oliver wipes his eyes and recovers.

OLIVER
I don’t know how to thank you. There’s no words... It's been so hard.

COTTON
I can only imagine the pain you've been feeling.

OLIVER
Everything I love in the world is embodied in that little girl. To have that thing eating at her soul.
(beat)
It's been torture.

COTTON
I'm sure in a way, it's been eating at your soul too.

Oliver nods somberly. Cotton sets his hand reassuringly on Oliver. Suddenly Cotton's head twitches dramatically. He holds his hand to his head, closing his eyes.

COTTON (cont'd)
There's something-.

CONTINUED:

OLIVER
What?

COTTON
I just got a feeling.

Cotton twitches again.

OLIVER
What's wrong?

COTTON
May I touch your neck?

OLIVER
Okay.

Cotton reaches out and touches Oliver's neck and closes his eyes.

COTTON
I'm getting a strong message. A very strong message.

OLIVER
What?

Cotton looks at Oliver, his eyes intense.

COTTON
The devil's got a little bit of a hold on you too.

OLIVER
Me?

COTTON
He's got you in a bottle. You're in a glass bottle, and your soul is drowning in that bottle.

Oliver looks at Cotton nervously.

COTTON (cont'd)
Don't let him strangle you. You can let the Lord lead you to a fresh pasture.

Oliver nods, and begin to tear up. Cotton's voice raises up.

COTTON (cont'd)
Come forth into the Lord's embrace and let him deliver you from the grip of Satan and free yourself of the bottle.

CONTINUED: (2)

Oliver starts to shake.

COTTON (cont'd)
That's right, brother. Take this man to the higher landing.

Cotton lays his hands on Oliver's head and presses. Oliver collapses to the ground.

Cotton kneels down and puts a handkerchief to Oliver's head.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - EVENING

Tyler watches from the porch as Cotton gets into his car, while Oliver bids him goodbye.

OLIVER
Are you sure?

COTTON
Thank you, but I'm going to check into the motel in town tonight.

OLIVER
Okay.

COTTON
Remember, I brought the Lord into this house. It's your job to keep him here.

Oliver is grateful.

INT. COTTON'S CAR - DAY

Cotton sits behind the wheel and pulls out of the driveway. Oliver and Nell wave to him.

COTTON
It's surprising to some how many people there are out there with problems like Oliver. But I see it all the time.

EXT. MOTEL - NIGHT

We see Cotton's car parked outside a motel.

INT. MOTEL - COTTON'S ROOM - NIGHT

Sipping from a can of beer, Cotton sits on the bed talking on the phone.

CONTINUED:

COTTON
Daddy misses you too. Put your mother back on the phone.
(beat)
Did they say what they meant by his not being a good candidate for the program?

Cotton winces. A beat.

COTTON (cont’d)
The new device, is that an over the ear?
(beat)
If the more expensive one is better, just get it. I’ll deal with the insurance assholes.

JUMP CUT TO:

Cotton has hung up the phone. He’s still sitting on the edge of the bed. Not exactly melancholy, but reflective.

COTTON (cont’d)
Sometimes things piles up. Sometimes, I’ll admit sometimes, I’ll still catch myself making an appeal to the sky. It’s like a phantom limb I’ll probably never be completely rid of... This world can be a handful. Angels and devils I know how to deal with.

LATER:

Cotton pops the top off a can of beer and takes a drink.

COTTON (CONT'D) (cont'd)
I used to care about being famous, having my own TV ministry. Now do you know what I care about? Health insurance.
(beat)
You ever think about having kids, Tracey?

TRACEY (OC)
Not likely. No.

He smiles wistfully.

COTTON
You want to have breakfast here or just roll out and we can maybe grab something on the road?

CONTINUED: (2)

TRACEY
If you want to just get going, that’s fine with us.

Cotton nods. Ok.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - CREW'S ROOM - NIGHT

Chaos.

The camera shakes wildly.

VOICE
Go. Go. Go.

The crew bolts down the hallway.

Tripping down a flight of steps they arrive at Cotton's room.

COTTON (OC)
What are you doing here?

They throw open the door.

Nell is inside. She’s different.

Her hair is matted, wet.

Her stare is glassy.

COTTON (cont’d)
(cautious)
Are you okay?

Slowly, her glassy eyes seem to focus in his general direction.

NELL
Help me.

Cotton approaches her cautiously. The girl turns and walks away before he gets to her... the camera PANS DOWN to focus on the bloody footprints the girl is leaving on the motel room carpet.

COTTON
Are you hurt? Nell, are you hurt? It looks like you hurt your feet. Did you walk all the way here barefoot?

Nell walks into the wall, puts her hands on it.

CONTINUED:

NELL
Please help me.

Cotton moves to her, touches her, intending to comfort her--but she recoils violently. He backs off.

COTTON
It’s alright. It’s alright...

Suddenly, inexplicably, a smile appears on the girl’s face. A sly smile. Knowing.

NELL
It’s alright.

COTTON
It is.

NELL
(slightly provocative)
It’s alright.

COTTON
That’s right. You’re safe here. We all want to help you.

Nell, still smiling that knowing smile, holds out her hand. Cotton takes it.

NELL
It’s alright.

Nell guides Cotton’s hand toward the place between her legs. Horrified, Cotton yanks his hand away.

COTTON
Nell!

NELL
It’s alright.

She slinks toward Cotton as he backs away, the innocent child’s movements eerily sensual.

NELL (cont’d)
I know what you want. It’s not like it’s a big secret or nothing.

Cotton panics. He doesn’t want any part of this.

COTTON
Nell stop this right now...

CONTINUED: (2)

NELL
I know how to do things...

COTTON
Right this instant!

He reaches out to shake her. She pulls away, pirouettes toward the bed.

NELL
Do you want to make a porno movie?

Nell flops on the bed, posing lustily for the camera, very much in the manner of an inexperienced young girl, playing around, imitating some imagined rite of adulthood.

COTTON
Stop this. What are you doing?

Nell starts to undress. (*The video is blurred appropriately*)

Cotton looks off-camera to Tracey anxious for some overdo assistance here.

TRACEY (O.S.)
Nell, get out of the bed.

NELL
But I'm so sleepy.

She cuddles up with the pillow.

NELL (cont'd)
You guys can do anything you want to me while I'm sleeping. I promise not to tell.

Suddenly, Nell sits up. Looking troubled. Cotton goes to her.

COTTON
This was my fear. She's too damn young.

She throws up. A little gets on him. He tsk-tsks and starts to wipe her mouth with a handkerchief.

EXT. MOTEL - NIGHT

Cotton puts Nell in the van.

INT. COTTON'S VAN - NIGHT

Nell lays asleep in the back. Cotton talks as he drives. His tone is like he’s trying to reassure himself.

CONTINUED:

COTTON
Sleepwalking is not that uncommon in cases like this. Especially with a younger person. Especially if there’s some kind of repressed trauma... which I suspect there very well might be here. And what we call “sleepwalking” is really kind of an umbrella for a whole range of behaviors... a whole range.

INT. LOCAL HOSPITAL -- EARLY MORNING

Cotton helps a dazed Nell, wrapped in a blanket, into a seat. He approaches the Admitting desk.

JUMP CUT TO:

The YOUNG JAMAICAN ADMITTING NURSE looks disgruntled.

NURSE
Sir, I cannot admit her without consent of her parent or a legal guardian unless it’s an emergency.

COTTON
It is an emergency.

NURSE
Sir...

The Nurse looks over at the camera.

NURSE (cont’d)
We cannot have that. Turn that off. Right now, please...

EXT. LOCAL HOSPITAL -- EARLY MORNING

The sun is rising. Cotton stands off by himself, having some kind of internal debate. Oliver pulls up in his truck. He looks frantic as he gets out. Cotton moves to cut him off.

COTTON
She’s fine.

OLIVER
What do you mean “she’s fine?”

COTTON
Physically, she’s unhurt, but she needs somebody to look at her. A trained psychologist that can make some recommendations...

CONTINUED:

Oliver isn’t even listening to Cotton. He’s heading inside. Cotton throws an exasperated look back at the camera.

INT. LOCAL HOSPITAL -- EARLY MORNING

THROUGH THE GLASS DOORS OF THE E.R.--

Oliver can be seen arguing heatedly with that Jamaican nurse.

EXT. LOCAL HOSPITAL -- EARLY MORNING

Cotton walks along as Oliver carries Nell back to his truck.

COTTON
Oliver, I really think you should leave her here for observation...

OLIVER
What are they gonna observe?

COTTON
Oliver, you’re her father, it’s your decision...

OLIVER
Damn right.

COTTON
But think for a second...

OLIVER
What are they going to do for her? What could they do? “We fight not enemies of flesh. We fight principalities and kingdoms of the air...”

That takes the wind out of Cotton’s sails, having his own words thrown back at him.

Oliver puts Nell in the passenger seat, slams the door.

INT. COTTON’S VAN – EARLY MORNING

Cotton follows Oliver’s tail-lights.

COTTON
This is bad. You never go into a situation you’re not in total control of. That’s rule number one... but what am I gonna do? I’m not gonna run... I’ve got to convince him to get her some help. The kind of help she really needs.

INT. FARMHOUSE –- DAY

Cotton waits in the den. Oliver enters from another room.

OLIVER
You said the demon was out.

COTTON
It is.

OLIVER
Then how do you explain the way she’s acting.

COTTON
The demon may depart but leave a lot of damage in its wake. Like when a burglar ransacks a house. That’s what he’s done in her mind. We have to deal with that.

OLIVER
You were supposed to ‘ve dealt with it. You said you did.

COTTON
I did.

OLIVER
I heard what she did! I heard what she did in your room. I heard.

COTTON
Did you think she’d be magically back to normal as soon as...

OLIVER
YES! Yes, that’s what I thought. That’s what you promised me. You said you could drive that thing out of her.

COTTON
First of all, I do nothing. I thought you understood that. It’s the Lord alone who has the power to save your daughter.

OLIVER
Then why isn’t he?!!

This comes out a desperate and poignantly sincere question.

Cotton is taken aback by it. He gathers himself, then goes to Oliver and places his hands on his shoulders, whispers some comforting words we don’t hear.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

Cotton shakes his head.

COTTON
What I’m trying to do is use the language of theology. Convince him that even though his daughter’s symptoms are demonic in origin, that you’re still obliged to treat the symptoms.

TRACEY (O.S.)
And how’s that going?

COTTON
I’ll get there. Give me time.

INT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

Oliver nods as Cotton lectures him.

COTTON
...now a third neighbor passes by in a motor boat and yells for the guy to hop in. But the man’s still steadfast: “No, I’m waiting for the Lord to save.” The waters rise and rise. The man drowns. He gets up to heaven and he asks God, “what’s the deal, man? Why didn’t you save me?” And the Lords says, “I tried to save you three times.”

Oliver nods thoughtfully.

OLIVER
That’s as may be, but what you’re talking about, all this psychiatric... psycho-whatever... none of that is from God.

Cotton starts to protest Oliver wasn’t listening, but Oliver cuts him off--

OLIVER (cont’d)
My daughter is not crazy. She’s an innocent victim here. I’d have thought you of all people’d understand that. Maybe you just been in the big city too long.

INT. NELL’S ROOM - DAY

Cotton talks to Nell in chairs by the window.

CONTINUED:

COTTON
When did these bad dreams start?

NELL
Just a little while ago. A couple of months ago?

COTTON
Did anything bad happen around that time? Anything you remember?

NELL
(a little smile)
Nothing ever happens. We live on a farm.

Cotton’s taken aback by the girl’s smile, her flash of wit.

NELL (cont’d)
I’m so embarrassed. You must think I’m a real weirdo.

Cotton laughs softly.

JUMP CUT TO:

COTTON
Do you miss public school?

Nell just kind of smiles and shrugs.

COTTON (cont’d)
How long did you go to public school? I know your father said he started home schooling you shortly after your mother passed away.

NELL
(nods)
Sixth grade.

COTTON
That must have been a very difficult time for you. And for your father. Your father must have been going through a lot of at the same time. Did he seem to change at all? The way you two got on or...

Nell looks at Cotton. Not sure what he means.

COTTON (cont’d)
Well... was he a good teacher?

CONTINUED: (2)

NELL
Sure.

COTTON
But it was hard not having any friends in school?

NELL
I don’t have any friends.
(as if correcting herself)
It just never comes up.

Cotton “hmms,” nods.

NELL (cont’d)
I had friends at Sunday School. When father let me go to Sunday classes. Last summer.

COTTON
That was at the church in town?

NELL
(nods)
Second Cavalry. That’s pretty much the last time I saw people much. I don’t miss it that much. I have things to do. I’m always busy. I like music... That’s one thing I do miss, I guess. The choir.

COTTON
(smiles)
You sing?

NELL
(shakes her head)
I play the flute.

COTTON
No kidding.

NELL
We played all kinds of music, not just hymns. I guess that’s one of the things my father didn’t like. He thinks church music should be church music.

COTTON
What was your favorite song?

CONTINUED: (3)

NELL
“One Tin Soldier.” It’s from the movie Billy Jack. I never saw it. It’s old, I guess. But I liked that song.

Nell seems to almost be fighting the urge to smile.

MOMENTS LATER

Nell is playing “One Tin Soldier” on the flute. Semi-competently, only squeaking now and then.

Watching Nell play, Cotton looks sincerely, deeply moved.

When she reaches the end with a bashful smile, Cotton claps loudly. Which makes her just look more embarrassed.

NELL
There’s more but I don’t know it.

She puts down the flute.

NELL (cont’d)
I’m kind of tired, I guess.

LATER

Cotton looks around the room. He sees a papier mache DIORAMA on Nell’s bedside table. A clearing in dark woods populated by four dolls. Cotton bends down and looks into it.

NELL
(embarrassed)
That’s just something stupid I made up.

COTTON
You make up stories?

Nell shrugs bashfully.

COTTON (cont’d)
Where do you get your ideas?

NELL
I don’t know. Sometimes things’ll just come to me. Sometimes I’ll have a dream or something.

COTTON
Dreams?

NELL
Or something, yeah.

CONTINUED:

COTTON
Was this a good dream or a bad dream?

NELL
(a shrug)
It was just a dream.

After he moves on, the camera adopts the POV Cotton just abandoned-- Through an opening in the matchstick trees, we see the figurines arranged with Kubrickian symmetry around a stone circle. A hooded figure stands with his back to us.(cutout of a magazine, glued to cardboard) Three dolls dressed in white gowns kneel on either side of him.

MOMENTS LATER

Cotton pokes around Nell’s dresser. He finds a lot of sheet music, mostly hymns and a few Christian magazines that have had pictures cut out of them with scissors... but what interests him are pages and pages of loosely bound pictures drawn in colored pencil. Some images clipped from the magazines, cherubs and what not, are glued to the pictures. As Cotton turns the pages, we see they are illustrations telling a story.

NELL
She’s....

Nell breaks off, giggling. Cotton smiles.

COTTON
No, go on... please.

NELL
Well, that’s Esther of Antioch and these are pretty much her adventures I guess you’d say.

COTTON
(smiling)
I don’t remember her from the Bible.

NELL
(smiling)
No, sir, you do not. She’s not from the Bible. I made her up.

In the pages “Mary” travels through fire, war and plague-- the horrors of each portrayed with surprising graphic detail--

COTTON
She goes through some rough times.

CONTINUED:

NELL
For a while, like happens in stories. But in the end she makes it to the Garden of Arathea which is where she was wanting to go.

Cotton turns to a page of Nell’s heroine meeting Jesus in a fairy tale forest.

COTTON
And she meets Jesus?

Nell smiles and nods, just a little uncomfortable.

Cotton holds the page so we can see it. It’s a picture of “Mary of Antioch” and Jesus holding hands under an arbor. It looks for all the world like an adolescent girl’s romantic fantasy.

EXT. FARMHOUSE -- DAY

Cotton guzzles a glass of water on the front porch.

COTTON
I’m not getting anywhere with Oliver... I’m thinking it’s time for me to set aside my pride and ask for some help here.

EXT. SECOND CAVALRY CHURCH -- DAY

Cotton walks up. AMARYLLIS, a young church employee is changing the lettering on the marquee.

COTTON
How are you doing today?

As the young woman looks up, she sees the camera. The presence of it amuses her.

COTTON (cont’d)
My name’s Cotton Marcus. I’m the reverend of Red Branch Baptist in Baton Rouge.

One eye on the camera, smiling a slightly embarrassed smile, the young woman shakes Cotton’s hand.

AMARYLIS
I’m Amarylis... what is this for?

COTTON
It’s a documentary.

CONTINUED:

AMARYLIS
We’re not really a controversial church. Into any of those controversy issues...

COTTON
No, no, no. I’m just here to pay a social call on Pastor Gerald.

Amarylis nods, looking not at Cotton, but at the camera and almost starting to giggle.

A MOMENT LATER--

Amarylis stands by, smiling shyly, as GERALD comes out .

GERALD
Hey, there. Gerald Manley.

COTTON
Cotton Marcus, how are you doing?

GERALD
Good to meet you... is this for PBS?

COTTON
Sorry to disappoint.

Gerald shrugs. Oh, well.

INT. LOCAL CHURCH -- DAY

They interview Pastor Gerald in the room that is used as a day care center with children’s art on the wall and toys shoved in the corner.

GERALD
Nell Sweetzer did indeed attend Sunday school for most of last summer. She’s a very bright girl. Very warm. Surprisingly outgoing for how...

COTTON
(as Gerald trails off)
How...?

GERALD
(smiles at his own reticence)
Well, as you must know, Oliver, her father is a very private man and he has chosen to raise his children in a very, uh, I guess... cloistered manner.

CONTINUED:

COTTON
Did Oliver ever give you a reason why he pulled his kids out of Sunday School?

GERALD
I was not given a specific set of grievances. My personal feeling, frankly, is just simply that what we were teaching here wasn't sufficiently medieval.

Cotton chuckles. Gerald adds a diffident shrug.

MOMENTS LATER:

Gerald shows Cotton a child's art work. A Cherub rendered in colored sand and sea shells.

GERALD (cont'd)
Nell did this. She was very creative.

JUMP CUT TO:

COTTON
Pastor, frankly I've reached an impasse with Oliver. I'm trying to get him to allow Nell to be looked at by the proper people. But he's rejecting out of hand any kind of medical or mental health intervention and at this point I'm basically the smooth talker from the big, bad city.

Gerald smiles and nods.

COTTON (cont'd)
Anyway, I was hoping that you, a man of the cloth, a local, somebody he knows, he might listen to you.

GERALD
Well, I'm more than happy to talk to Oliver any time, but I can't honestly tell you I'd have any hope of success. I've tried to reach out to Oliver many times.

COTTON
I see.

GERALD
I want to be careful how I say this, but I do admit... just the nature of the tragedy they've been through, the way Nell is being raised... the isolation.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

GERALD(cont'd)

I admit I've had concerns. I tried to get Oliver to go through grief counseling. My brother-in-law is a therapist at one of the top rated hospitals in Baton Rouge...

COTTON
But psychology is not of the Lord.

Gerald shrug-nods. You got it.

EXT. FARM - DAY

As Cotton's car pulls in, Oliver is struggling with Nell in the fields. The camera struggles to keep up as Cotton gets out of the car.

As Cotton approaches Oliver starts dragging Nell towards the house.

COTTON
What's going on?

Nell is crying hysterically.

OLIVER
Into the house.

COTTON
What has she done?

INT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

Coming through the front door we see Tyler lowering himself onto the couch. His face and torso are covered with blood, marked by livid, fresh slashes.

We hear Nell screaming from another room.

NELL (O.S.)
No!!

As Cotton rushes to Tyler to see if he's alright, the camera pans with him... then veers off toward the hall. Somewhere in the back of the house, Oliver is yelling orders, Nell sobbing loudly.

Cotton pushes past the camera, going to see what's going on. Oliver appears in the hall in front of him. Flushed, he points at the camera.

OLIVER
Back off!

The camera backs away.

DEN -- MOMENTS LATER

Tracey stands beside solicitously beside Tyler who holds a red-soaked towel to the deep gash on his face, near the jawline.

The camera ZOOMS IN on an object on the floor-- A BLOOD-STAINED KNIFE.

Cotton comes back in.

COTTON
Nell started acting up. Tyler was trying to calm her down and, apparently, at some point, she slashed him.

Cotton returns to Tyler. Tyler tries to speak.

COTTON (cont'd)
What is it?

Tyler point to a pen and paper. Cotton brings it to him. Tyler writes out a note. Cotton reads it. He takes a deep breath and folds it and puts it into his pocket-- just as Oliver is coming from the back of the house.

OLIVER
He's lost a lot of blood.

COTTON
Is there anything I can do?

OLIVER
You could take him to the doctor.

Tyler and Cotton look at each other.

COTTON
Why don't you take Tyler and I'll look after Nell? If the demon is manifesting, I want to be here to confront him

.Oliver considers this option for a moment. Cotton tries to assuage his doubts.

COTTON (cont'd)
The Lord will watch over us.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

Oliver and Cotton help Tyler into the car.

IN THE CAR

CONTINUED:

Tyler is moaning. Oliver starts the engine.

OLIVER
Thank you for staying.

COTTON
Of course.

OLIVER
I'll be back as soon as possible.

Oliver drives away. Cotton turns back towards the house and takes a breath. He opens the note and shows it to the camera.

INSERT TYLER'S NOTE: "Don’t let him hurt her."

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Cotton follows Nell’s SOBS.

COTTON
Nell? Where are you?

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Cotton tries to locate her. He follows the SOBS as they ECHO through the house.

Cotton tries the light switch. Nothing happens. He BANGS it... He’s frustrated...

Cotton uses his lighter to guide him.

Cotton feels his way through the dimness.

He finds a door...

It’s triple padlocked.

Cotton puts his ear to the door and knocks.

COTTON (cont’d)
Nell, are you in here?

NELL (O.C)
Yes, sir.

He finds a set of keys hanging from a hook. He takes them and unlocks the door.

INT. LAUNDRY ROOM - DAY

CONTINUED:

A rusted washer and dryer sit along one wall.

Nell lays on a cot, SOBBING uncontrollably.

Her foot is CHAINED to the cot.

COTTON
Oh no.

Cotton tries to get the chain off, but the padlock is secure.

COTTON (cont'd)
Hang on.

INT. UTILITY SHED - DAY

Cotton finds a hacksaw. He talks to the crew (off-camera).

COTTON (cont'd)
No way. We're not taking her anywhere. That's called kidnapping.

INT. LAUNDRY ROOM - DAY

Cotton returns with the saw and thinks about the best way to free her. Nell, calmer now, looks earnestly at Cotton.

NELL
Don't undo them.

COTTON
Why?

NELL
Because I'm bad.

COTTON
Maybe you've done something bad, but that doesn't make you bad.

NELL
Does Jesus love me, sir?

COTTON
Of course he does.

LATER:

Cotton saws away at the chain. Eventually he is able to free her limbs, although she is left with a bit of chain and a padlock hanging from her leg.

INT. KITCHEN - EVENING

Cotton studies her.

COTTON
Oliver says you attacked Tyler.

Nell doesn't have a comment.

COTTON (cont'd)
Do you remember?

She doesn’t respond.

COTTON (cont’d)
Whatever happened might not be your fault.

Nell doesn't understand.

COTTON (cont'd)
The trance I put you in may have released some things.

NELL
Abalam?

COTTON
No. Feelings. About Tyler?

She shakes her head no.

COTTON (cont’d)
What about your father?

NELL
I don’t know.

COTTON
You can tell me anything, Nell. It’s just between us.

Nell shakes her head.

NELL
My father’s just a sad man.

INT. NELL'S ROOM - NIGHT

Nell lies hunched in her bed. The chain on her ankle CLINKS whenever she moves.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - EVENING

As the sun begins to go down, Cotton looks towards the main road and checks his watch.

COTTON
Where the hell are they?

The sun drops below the horizon.

INT. NELL'S ROOM - NIGHT

Cotton finds Nell in the same position he left her. She's still awake.

COTTON
You need to get some sleep.

NELL
I'm afraid.

COTTON
Don't rush it. It will come to you.

NELL
Don't leave me alone.

COTTON
I'll be close by. I promise that nothing bad will happen tonight.

Cotton leaves the room.

INT. LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

Cotton rubs his eyes. Lack of sleep getting to him.

COTTON
When Oliver comes back, I'm going to give him a flat-out ultimatum. We take her to the hospital together or I call social services. That's it... That's it.

MOMENTS LATER

Tracey is motioning for the camera to follow her... we follow her up the stairs.

The camera then refocuses where Tracey's gaze directs it-- Nell standing frozen in a doorway, half-turned away from us.

Cotton arrives in the upstairs hall. Sees her.

CONTINUED:

COTTON (cont'd)
(softly)
Nell?

The camera follows as Cotton approaches her warily, with the classic reluctance to wake a sleepwalker.

Before he gets to her, Nell moves on.

The camera man follows her, keeping his distance... He momentarily loses sight of her, then finds her again, framed by the doorway of the adjacent bathroom.

She's doing some strange pantomime over the bath tub, whispering to herself. We keep our distance.

Until she suddenly starts screaming.

Cotton rushes in to restrain Nell from hurting herself... Entering right behind him, Tracey audibly gasps, shocked by what appears to be a baby under the water in the bathtub.

TRACEY
Is that a baby? IS THAT A BABY?!!!

COTTON
It's a doll.

The camera ZOOMS IN on the object underwater in the tub and it is indeed a porcelain child's doll.

INT. NELL'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Tracey helps Cotton return Nell to her room. She cleaves to Tracey, throwing her arms around her, taking the young woman by surprise. She awkwardly pats Nell's back.

MOMENTS LATER

Nell is sitting on her bed. Cotton is with her.

He notes some fresh drawings on the bedside table. No cute heroine this time, just a scene of horror-- a splayed female figure with a blur of red over her torso.

Nell looks embarrassed by what she's drawn.

COTTON
We're going to get you some help.

NELL
What kind of help?

CONTINUED:

COTTON
Medical help. Psychological help. The whole kit and kaboodle.

NELL
What about you? Are you going to help me?

COTTON
There's nothing I can do. I don't have the proper training.

NELL
You're a preacher.

COTTON
You need people who have something real they can offer you. All I can do is sell you snake oil.

She looks at Cotton confused.

NELL
I need a Man of the Lord.

COTTON
Well, I’m not. Child, I am not a Man of the Lord.

Nell absorbs the meaning of his words, but doesn’t respond.

INT. LIVING ROOM -- LATER

Cotton sits with Tracey. Her DAT is between them. She glances at the camera. Then presses play.

TRACEY
This is the audio of Nell in the bathroom.

Cotton and Tracey listen: Silence for a while, interrupted only by muffled SHUFFLING... then Nell’s VOICE. Whispering. Cotton shuts his eyes, straining to hear. Tracey turns it up.

NELL (ON TAPE)
...Is multiplicatus... sub tergum... emanio vos penetralis...

COTTON
That’s Latin.

TRACEY
Does she know Latin? Can she know Latin?

CONTINUED:

COTTON
Well, she most certainly did not receive a Catholic education.

They rewind the tape, listen again.

TRACEY
Multiplicatus-- Multiply?

COTTON
Sub tergum... under the skin... penetralis... it grows under the skin, it spreads inside you...

TRACEY
It’s like she’s describing the demon consuming her personality.

TEDDY (O.C.)
It sounds to me like she’s describing cancer.

Cotton and Tracey look at the camera, at each other.

TRACEY
Her mother?

They let the tape play on to the point where Nell starts screaming. Tracey shuts it off.

INT. FARMHOUSE – LATER

The phone is ringing. The camera follows Cotton as he answers.

COTTON (INTO PHONE)
Yes... yes...
(to camera)
It’s the doctor who saw Nell in the ER.

TRACEY
Can you put it on speaker?

Cotton presses speaker phone.

DOCTOR (O.S.)
It’s on the log here the initial intern perscribed Halcion...?

COTTON (INTO PHONE)
Yes.

CONTINUED:

DOCTOR (O.S.)
I’m glad I caught that. You should not fill that perscription if you haven’t already.

COTTON
I don’t think we have.

DOCTOR (O.S.)
Good, well, just throw it away. The intern was not aware of the pregnancy and Halcion is not something she should be taking right now.

Cotton blinks. Stunned

COTTON
Nell we’re talking about... Nell Sweetzer?

DOCTOR (O.S.)
Yes, that’s what I see here. Just give her Pepto Bismal for right now if she’s continuing to experience nausea. The nausea itself, of course, is nothing to worry about, it’s to be expected the first few months. Sometimes longer.

COTTON (INTO PHONE)
Pepto Bismal... thank you doctor... are you at the hospital right now...

DOCTOR (O.S.)
No, I’m on the road.

COTTON (INTO PHONE)
I was just looking for somebody at the hospital.

DOCTOR (O.S.)
Well, you can try the desk but they’re pretty jammed on the weekends. Drunken kids in cars.

COTTON (INTO PHONE)
Well, you be careful on the road.

MOMENTS LATER

Cotton processes what he’s learned.

CONTINUED:

COTTON
It was right in front of us the whole time. It’s the cliche formula isn’t it? Father, daughter, farm. Just given those three elements, there’s the obvious conclusion to jump to.

TRACEY (O.S.)
I think we have to.

The camera catches Tracey as she moves past.

TRACEY (cont’d)
I don’t give a fuck about maintaining objectivity at this moment. We know exactly what’s going on here.

TEDDY (O.S.)
Tracey, are you sure you’re not projecting...

Tracey looks disgustedly past the camera at the camera man.

TRACEY
Oh, fuck you, Teddy. Just fuck you.

COTTON
I think he's coming.

The camera quickly pans over to where Cotton’s looking. Out the window. A false alarm, some truck in the distance.

COTTON (cont’d)
Anyone besides me need a drink?

TEDDY
I would love to shut my eyes for twenty minutes.

Cotton shrugs, suit yourself. He opens a cabinet, takes down a bottle of Bourbon.

LIVING ROOM -- LATER

An oddly removed angle. We’re shooting through the doorway of a downstairs guest room. Tracey is sitting on the sofa, smoking. Cotton enviously watches her smoke.

COTTON
Can I get one of those off you?

As Tracey reaches to give him a cigarette, the camera backs away... some blurred movement and when the image stabilizes...

EXT. FARMHOUSE -- NIGHT

...we’re outside, prowling around the outside of the house. We can see Cotton and Tracey through the living room window. We keep moving... The prowling camera finds a CAT on the porch, curled up in a little bed made of an old blanket. The camera moves closer on the sleeping creature. Closer. So close we can see its little nose minutely twitching.

The camera starts to retreat then sweeps forward with shocking swiftness.

We hear the cat’s CRY. All we see is a blur as the camera rears back and plunges downward. Over and over. The camera is being used as a blunt instrument to kill the animal.

When it’s done, the camera calmly regards a mass of bloody fur through a red-spattered lens then withdraws.

Through the blood-smeared camera lens, we move back into the house... the camera moves to the open window of that downstairs guest room... we can see Teddy the camera man sleeping fully clothed on top of the covers on the bed... we move, a little clumsily, in through the window...

INT. FARMHOUSE - GUEST HOUSE -- NIGHT

We’re right over Teddy now. Moving in close on his sleeping face. Close enough to see a little drool collecting in the corner of his mouth. Closer...

COTTON (O.S.)
Nell!

Everything goes blurry. SCUFFLING.

TRACEY (V.O.)
Nell... That’s a $20,000 camera...

The image goes still as the camera is dropped. Feet. Nell can be heard laughing.

LATER

Tracey looks directly into the lens as the camera focuses.

TEDDY (O.C.)
Seems okay. We’re good.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY -- LATER

We glimpse of Nell sitting calmly on the bed as Cotton comes out of Nell’s room. He closes the door behind him.

CONTINUED:

Locks it.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Cotton is freshening up in the bathroom. He stops. Listening. After a moment, we hear it too: a sibilant WHISPERING interrupted every now and then by a lower-pitched MURMUR. Like two people trying to argue quietly... Cotton follows the VOICES...

INT. NELL'S ROOM – EVENING

Cotton looks in. Nell is still sitting up in bed, staring blankly at the window.

Cotton backs out.

INT. LIVING ROOM -- LATER

Cotton sits, holding the porcelain doll they found in the bathtub, turning it in his hands. HEADLIGHTS sweep across the front window.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Oliver is greeted by Cotton. Tyler is not with him.

OLIVER
He's going to be all right. He's shook up though.
(beat)
How's Nell?

INT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Oliver returns from looking in on Nell.

COTTON
Is she sleeping?

OLIVER
Resting.
(a long beat)
So you talked to that doctor at the hospital? What did he say?

COTTON
He says Nell is with child.

Oliver is quite obviously affected by the news, but also obviously not completely surprised, either.

CONTINUED:

OLIVER
Then the book is true. She's been defiled.

COTTON
What are you talking about?

OLIVER
The quotation you read about Abalam. How he defiles the flesh of the innocent.

COTTON
It's not Abalam's baby.

OLIVER
How do you know that?

Cotton carefully formulates a response.

COTTON
Because I can feel evil, and there is no evil in your daughter.

OLIVER
How else do you explain it? She's a virgin.

COTTON
Your daughter is not a virgin. She’s pregnant. Which is one more reason why she should be getting looked at by a doctor as soon as possible.

Oliver looks intensely at Cotton. Looking about to explode. But he doesn’t. He walks outside.

COTTON (cont’d)
Obviously he doesn't want her examined because he's afraid of what they’d discover.

TRACEY
Like who the father is... We should just put her in the car right now. I don’t give a shit about legality right now.

The camera moves to a window that affords a view of Oliver standing at the end of the porch. His back is to us, but it’s clear he’s fuming.

CONTINUED: (2)

TEDDY (O.S.)
You know, I don’t want to contribute to the drama here but I’d be remiss if I didn’t point out Mr. NRA's got like five million guns stashed all over the house.

Cotton and Tracey joining the camera man by the window share his concern.

FARMHOUSE - LATER

Cotton looks anxious... the camera pans to the window. Oliver is still keeping his vigil out there.

TRACEY (O.S.)
What’s he doing?

COTTON
I’d be more concerned with what he’s thinking.

TRACEY (O.S.)
What do you mean?

COTTON
I mean if we’re right and he did what we think he did to his daughter, he’s never going to let us take her out of here. And I’m not talking legalities either.

TRACEY (O.S.)
How far do you think he’d go?

COTTON
Do you have any reason to believe he has a limits? Also, it’s probably occurred to him by know that all this footage you’ve been shooting is pretty damning evidence against him.

The camera pans over to Tracey. She looks sallow, terrified.

COTTON (cont’d)
But maybe we can use that. I can tell him the truth which is at there’s only two ways this ends. Either we all agree to handle this quietly or the authorities get involved at some point. He’s got to know there’s...

Tracey notices something that makes her even more scared.

CONTINUED:

TRACEY
He’s gone.

The camera whip pans to the window. Oliver has, indeed, abandoned his post.

TRACEY (cont’d)
Where’d he go?

COTTON
(looking out window)
His truck’s still there.

The camera moves exploringly, trying to find Oliver outside... Then gets a glimpse of him just as he disappears around the far corner of the house.

TEDDY (V.O.)
There he is.

The LIGHTS GO OUT in the back of the house a second later.

TRACEY
(freaked)
Did he do that? Why would he do that?

Cotton moves to the window, opens it, shouts out--

COTTON
Oliver?

No answer.

A NOISE comes from the darkened room. Like something being knocked over.

COTTON (cont’d)
Hello?

No answer from that quarter... but now A LOUD NOISE come from upstairs.

A sound like footsteps.

Only they couldn’t be Nell’s. Or even Oliver’s. These are like ELEPHANT FOOTSTEPS.

The light focuses on Tracey as she holds her boom mic up toward the ceiling.

The noises stop. She shakes her head.

CONTINUED: (2)

TRACEY
What is that?

Cotton has no answer for her.

Oliver’s silhouette moves past the window behind him.

TEDDY (O.C.)
Hey, hey, hey,

Oliver’s shadow has moved on, but Cotton rushes to the window to where he’s gotten to.

TRACEY
What kind of a fucking game is he playing?

COTTON
I don’t know.

They move to different windows, looking for Oliver.

DEN -- MOMENTS LATER

Teddy turns on the camera’s light. It sweeps across the wall looking for something.

TRACEY
No... here.

Now it finds where Tracey is pointing. Oliver’s gun case is open. A key’s still in the lock, the whole dangling ring of keys glint brightly in the camera’s light.

An empty space in the rack clearly shows one of the rifles is missing.

LIVING ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Back in the lighted part of the house, Cotton is trying the phone. He shakes his head. No go.

COTTON
You’re going to keep filming?

TRACEY
What else am I going to do? This is what I do. I’m not going to apologize for it...

COTTON
(shakes his head, he’s not listening to her)
I’m going to talk to him.

CONTINUED:

TRACEY
Is it so smart to try to put an ultimatum on a guy with a gun?

TEDDY (O.C.)
I gotta say I kinda concur.

Cotton doesn’t listen to them. He goes to the front door...

TEDDY (O.S.) (cont’d)
Cotton...

Cotton pulls the front door open.

The camera fearfully retreats.

COTTON
Oliver, come on now.

Watching Cotton’s back framed by the front doorway, we expect him to be plugged at any moment.

COTTON (cont’d)
Oliver!

Those ELEPHANTINE FOOTSTEPS return. LOUDER.

Cotton moves toward the stairs. He looks at Tracey. At the camera. There’s something in his eyes we haven’t seen before: true fear. It’s the opposite of reassuring.

The FOOTSTEPS stop.

A second later, a blood-curdling SCREAM. It's Nell.

INT. UPSTAIRS - NIGHT

Cotton dashes down the hallway to Nell's room. Fumbling with the key.

When he turns the key in the lock, he finds the door still won’t open. It’s jammed somehow.

COTTON (cont’d)
Nell?

No one answers. Nell MOANS inside.

COTTON (cont'd)
Nell!

He hears something. It’s FAINT... VERY FAINT...

CONTINUED: (2)

LOW-PITCHED VOICES. More than one. Inside Nell’s room. He presses his ear to the door.

The voices grows louder.

Cotton tries the doorknob again, but it won't turn.

He BANGS on the door.

He SHAKES the knob violently, trying to break the door in.

Nell SCREAMS and then suddenly...

The VOICES turn into a sort of GUTTURAL GIBBERISH LANGUAGE.

Cotton kicks hard. The knob is broken off the door.

NELL’S ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Barging into the room, Cotton sees something in the corner of his eye. He turns. He can’t believe ... GRAFFITI covers an entire wall. Strange cabalistic symbols.

TRACEY
Is that blood?

Cotton moves closer, inspects the letters on the wall.

TRACEY (cont’d)
That is blood.

The window is blown out, jagged glass, splintered wood, like somebody had blasted it with a shotgun.

Cotton rushes to the window, looks out.

Below, there’s no sign of Nell.

But A SHAPE emerges from the shadows just behind Cotton. A shape barely discernible as Nell. Cotton doesn’t see her.

The Nell-Shape darts out the door.

We hear Tracey SHRIEK... the camera whips around just in time to glimpse Nell’s shadow on the wall of the hall an instant before it vanishes.

HALL -- CONTINUOUS

Running.

CONTINUED:

To the top of the stairs just in time to see Nell, silhouetted, scrambling with an animal lope toward someplace out of sight.

STAIRS -- CONTINUOUS

Cotton reaches the living room. No sign of Nell down here, no sign of which way she went.

The camera shines its LIGHT down the dark downstairs hall.

COTTON
Nell?

Tracey comes down the stairs behind them, holding her hand. There’s blood.

TRACEY
She cut my hand. When she was running out the door she slashed my hand with something.

Cotton carefully looks at Tracey’s hand.

COTTON
Scissors.
(mad at himself)
She had scissors in her room.

HALLWAY/RUMPUS ROOM

The camera moves down the dark hallway with only the light on the camera giving us a narrow zone of illumination in pitch black.

At the end of the hall, we come upon what looks to be a pack rat’s storage room. The camera light sweeps over filled with decades of junk.

TEDDY
Watch out here...

Teddy brings around the camera’s light to illuminate am obstacle for Cotton...

Suddenly-- SHUFFLING in the dark, MUTTERED CURSES.

The camera searches the dark for the source of the commotion.

TRACEY
What is it? What happened?

CONTINUED:

The camera light finds Cotton slightly hunched over, looking down, examining his abdomen.

TRACEY (cont'd)
Are you okay?

Cotton nods. He shows her the rip in his jacket where Nell slashed at him. A few drops of blood.

COTTON
She was right behind me. I could hear her breathing...

...and now from somewhere in the dark, we hear a PANTING like an animal.

Cotton moves stuff around clearing a path toward the sound.

The PANTING changes to RETCHING...

The camera moves to the sound, locating... Nell hunched over, shoulders heaving violently. Sick.

She hears Cotton's approach and whips around. Her eyes catch the camera's light eeriely. Blood smears her mouth red like a clown's. We catch just a glimpse of her before she scampers off like a spooked animal, disappearing into the dark.

The camera light focuses on the spot where Nell was squatted moments before. Focuses on he puddle Nell vomited up. It looks unhealthy, blood-tinged.

COTTON (cont'd)
Lord.

ZOOM IN on what Cotton's noticed. The remains of a small animal in the "stew." The long tail indicates it was a rat.

EXT. FARMHOUSE – NIGHT

They're looking for Nell around the side of the house, calling for her...

TRACEY (O.S.)
Whoa, whoa, whoa.

The camera pans over to where Tracey is directing Cotton's attention, back toward the house.

Catching the silhouetted figure of Nell at an upstairs window.

She's only there a second. Then she's gone.

CONTINUED:

TEDDY (O.S.)
Cotton...

They've all seen it. They hustle back toward the house. The camera follows... but before they get there HARROWING ANIMAL NOISES echo through the night.

TRACEY
What is that?

COTTON
That's the barn.

TRACEY
How'd she get over there so fast?

EXT. BARN - MOMENTS LATER

Cotton and Tracey stand frozen in the camera's light. A terrible SQUEALING is coming from inside the barn. Then abruptly, it cuts off.

Nell's in there. They all know it.

Cotton really, really doesn't want to go into that barn but he knows he has to.

INT. BARN - NIGHT

It's disturbingly QUIET. Cotton makes his way slowly... very slowly... the light from the camera about the only illumination.

COTTON
Nell?

No response.

Barely audible at first, but it's there... In a stall... Something PANTING.

COTTON (cont'd)
Nell?

Cotton draws near.

The PANTING stops.

A long maddening silence.

Suddenly...

A SCREECH.

CONTINUED:

FEATHERS.

A BLUR.

A chicken flees its roost. Cotton jumps backwards.

Cotton catches his breath. He turns to the stall.

He moves as silently as possible. He puts his hand on the stall door. Suddenly...

It SWINGS it towards him. He gasps.

Something darts past him in the dark.

In the stall lies...

A dead cow. Slashed.

The camera light moves from stall to stall and finds in each one, the same story. Freshly slaughtered livestock.

She stands against the wall, half-nude, covered with the blood of her kills. Posed with her arms out at her sides, head tilted down. A blasphemous caricature of the crucifixion.

She mischievously opens one eye, giggles. Then dashes off, disappearing into the dark.

Teddy sweeps the camera light around, trying to find her again.

COTTON (cont'd)
Do you see her?

NEEEEIGHHH

An animal's blood curdling scream rips through the blackness.

The sweeping light illuminates a writhing form in front of them. Hooves kicking wildly.

It's a horse. It's belly torn open.

The light catches its madly staring eye.

The scissors lay in bloody hay.

The camera circling camera takes in a horrified Cotton and the flailing animal.

CONTINUED: (2)

Nell scuttles like an animal on all fours through the band of light behind Cotton’s back... the camera turns along with Cotton-- just in time to see her dash out the barn door. Little more than a blur.

EXT. FARMHOUSE -- MOMENTS LATER

The camera prowls around by the utility shed... Something breaks from behind the structure.

She must be very fast because suddenly she’s way ahead of us. Silhouetted, Nell races across the field, loping like an animal.

Cotton is in pursuit, but she is too far ahead. She escapes into a thick cover of woods.

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

Cotton looks into the woods while he gasps for air.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Stepping lightly over the twigs, Cotton tries to figure out which direction Nell's gone.

He hears... twigs SNAP.

TEDDY (OC)
Over there?

COTTON
Yeah.

The camera SPINS towards the sound.

There’s nothing there.

They hear another SOUND, further off. Maybe a branch falling, maybe something else?

JUMP CUT TO:

Cotton is pointing... the camera goes where he’s pointing.

A shadow moves in the tall brush.

When the shadow stops moving, it becomes impossible to see. The camera MOVES IN on the spot. Closer... we see the contours of a shape in the brush...

COTTON (cont’d)
Nell?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The camera suddenly pans over in the opposite direction of the way Cotton is looking Nell comes staggering into the camera’s light, staggering toward us.

Nell comes shuffling straight toward the camera, zombie-like. Her eyes are rolled back in her head, white.

Suddenly, Nell’s expression, her very face, seems to change into a harpy mask as she lunges wildly at the camera. Animalistic.

The action is a frantic jumble we only witness in sweeping arcs of light but we can make out Tracey helping Cotton subdue Nell.

Nell keeps laughing like it was all great sport even as he wrestles her to the ground.

INT. LIVING ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Cotton is handing over his car keys to Teddy the camera man.

COTTON
You sure you want to do this?

TRACEY
No, it’s got to be. I’m the fastest one. ...I’ll feel a lot better once I’m in the car.

COTTON
(nods)
Just bring the car right up to the front door and I’ll carry Nell out.

Nell is in the next room. We hear her talking to herself in singsong interrupted only by chillingly childlike giggles.

Teddy looks over at the camera.

TEDDY
You’re going to just keep filming everything?

TRACEY
This all has to be documented.

TEDDY
(to Cotton)
At least it’s more “evidence” right?

Cotton smiles. Teddy looks toward the window.

CONTINUED:

TEDDY (cont'd)
Do we see him?

INT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Oliver patrols the perimeter of the house. Cotton peeks through a window and watches.

As Oliver's patrol takes him around the corner and out of view, Cotton signals Teddy.

COTTON
Now.

Teddy wiggles out the window. He lands roughly in a heap. He looks around disoriented.

COTTON (cont'd)
Get up.

He gets up slowly and then regains his bearings. He sprints to the car.

We watch from the house as Teddy carefully...slowly... opens the car door and slides in. He gives Cotton a thumbs up sign.

Cotton shakes his head in disbelief.

Teddy tries the key. The hollow CLICK of an engine not turning over sounds all the way to the house. Teddy tries again.

As Oliver re-appears from behind the barn.

COTTON (cont'd)
Shit.

Cotton signals the kid in the car but he's not looking.

Teddy futilely tries the ignition again.

COTTON (cont'd)
Teddy!

Teddy now sees Oliver coming. Sees Oliver's shotgun.

He gets out of the car, starts backpedaling toward the house.

Oliver is saying something to him, but we can't hear what.

Teddy turns and runs back toward the house.

CONTINUED:

Oliver keeps coming, right behind him. Like a redneck Terminator.

Teddy comes through the door, slams it shut behind him. Draws the bolt.

Cotton pulls the young man away from the door in case Oliver shoots through it.

He and Cotton look at each other, wondering what to do.

And now there’s a KNOCK on the front door. It’s Oliver knocking for admittance to his own house.

What are they going to do?

Cotton opens the door, lets Oliver in. Oliver looks around. He doesn’t threaten anybody, but he doesn’t put the gun down, either. He looks at the camera.

OLIVER
Turn that off, please.

MOMENTS LATER

We’ve cut to another angle, an odd angle that suggests Tracey is surreptitiously continuing her filming. Oliver is sitting in a chair, still holding onto that gun.

OLIVER
...allow you to bring outsiders into this situation. No police, none of your “mental health- social services...” Nothing. This has got to be taken care of tonight.

COTTON
But why? Why tonight?

Oliver mutters. Slumps forward in the chair.

COTTON (cont’d)
Oliver, we have to help your daughter.

OLIVER
I had enough of your help! It hasn’t helped anything. I got to do this myself. I got to take it upon myself...

COTTON
Oliver...

CONTINUED:

OLIVER
I cannot abide that thing being in her another minute!

Cotton and off-camera Tracey trade looks. Both understanding the obvious subtext-- why Oliver thinks Nell’s pregnancy is an abomination.

COTTON
We’ll free your daughter of what’s inside her. The exorcism didn’t work because I didn’t know about the unclean thing growing inside her. Now we know. Give me one more chance.

Oliver looks at Cotton, desperately wanting to believe him.

OLIVER
You get it out of her... you get it out of her or by God I’ll do the only thing left I can do for her.

OMITTED

MOMENTS LATER

Tracey catches up with Cotton in the next room.

TRACEY
You’re going to do another exorcism? Right now? With none of your props, without any... how are you...? What exactly are you going to do?

COTTON
I’m going to assert dominion over the demon inside her.
(off Tracey’s off-camera look)
She is possessed. Abalam is real. Even if it’s only in her head, he’s real. And if “Abalam” exists, he can be exorcised.

EXT. FARMHOUSE -- DAWN

THROUGH THE WINDOW--

Cotton stands by himself in the field behind the house, head bowed. He appears to be praying.

INT. BACK ROOM -- DAY

A space has been cleared out in the floor. Nell sits on the floor, hands bound. Cotton circles her, holding his Bible.

CONTINUED:

COTTON
I’m going to read you a passage from the Bible. Psalm five... do you know it?

The camera pushes in on Nell. Looking down, rocking slightly.

COTTON (cont’d)
O God, you take no pleasure in wickedness; you cannot tolerate the sins of the wicked...

As Cotton reads from the Bible, Nell slowly rises. The camera backs away, almost as if it were scared of her.

COTTON (cont’d)
...the proud may not stand in your presence, for you hate all who do evil...

Nell stands stock still. Slowly, she looks around.

Then her eyes find the camera. Us. A crooked smile curls her lips.

COTTON (cont’d)
Nell... Nell can you hear me?

She moves toward the camera. Her chilling, malevolent gaze holding the lens captive.

Then she lunges forward...

NELL
Boo.

The camera actually jerks backward. Nell collapses to the floor, seized by sporadic girlish giggles.

When Cotton approaches, she rolls over on her back, looking up at him, grinning mischeviously.

NELL (cont’d)
I hope you’re proud of yourself. Tying up a sixteen year old girl. Is this your fantasy?

COTTON
Is that who I’m talking to? A sixteen year old girl? Is this Nell?

NELL
Yes, it’s Nell you’re talking to. I’m a sweet child. I play the flute.

CONTINUED: (2)

Nell rises up on her haunches. Cotton backs off.

NELL (cont'd)
I like ponies and rainbows. So untie me.

COTTON
That little bit of rope really's a hindrance to you?

NELL
Come closer and see.

COTTON
(smiles)
What is your name, demon.

NELL
I thought you knew.

COTTON
Why don't you tell me?

NELL
Why are you pretending to care? Because that crazy old fuck out there has a gun? Is that really why? Who are you trying to impress? ...them?
(glances at the camera)
You have just as much contempt for the sheep as I do. How eager they are to swallow lies. You vomit lies and they lick it up like ice cream. If they weren't so gullible, we'd both be out of a job...

Cotton comes over and makes Nell look at him. The camera circles them like they were boxers in the ring.

COTTON
Enough. Playtime's over. Talk to me.

NELL
I am talking to you. You just don't like what you're hearing.

COTTON
Let me talk to Nell.

NELL
Why?

CONTINUED: (3)

COTTON
I want to talk to Nell.
(adopting “preacher” voice)
In the name of the Lord...

NELL
Fuck the Lord shit just for a second. Please. One fucking second. For your own sake, Jesus. Just once admit how much you hate them. Their pathetic, neurotic, needy bleating. Putting one over them is the only thing that gets your cock hard anymore...

Nell reaches for Cotton’s crotch. He pushes her away. She scuttles backward, giggling. The camera pulls back to keep up with the action.

NELL (cont’d)
I don’t blame you. You look over at the fat cow snoring next to you and you wonder what happened to the Georgia peach you married. Poor, poor man...

The camera pans over to Cotton to get his reaction. He shows just a little. He fumbles with his Bible, starts reading again--

COTTON
You will destroy those who tell lies. The Lord detests murderers and deceivers...

As Cotton reads, Nell crawls on all fours, tunelessly humming a mocking little tune, humming louder and louder-- doing the “I can’t hear you” thing like a little child.

Cotton moves to her, reaches down to her. Suddenly, Nell whips around, snapping like a rabid dog, biting Cotton’s hand.

Oliver rushes into frame. Cotton stops him with a gesture.

COTTON (cont’d)
No!
(to Tracey)
Just get him out of here. Take him upstairs. Go!

Nell is lolling her tongue around her open mouth, licking her lips lasciviously.

CONTINUED: (4)

COTTON (cont'd)
We do not fear any harm you can do to us. You are powerless to injure us in any way.

Nell nods as if agreeing with him.

NELL
You're only worried about the little girl.

Nell holds up her hand.

And casually breaks one of own fingers.

Cotton is shocked but overcomes the temptation to do anything.

COTTON
Leave her. Leave this child.

NELL
Make me.

Nell breaks another of her fingers, smiling.

Cotton tries to restrain Nell. She pulls away. HOWLING like a banshee-- in pain or madness, it's impossible to tell-- she rears this way and that, throwing herself into the walls.

Cotton lets her go. He starts reading again from his Bible.

Nell laughs hysterically as she bangs the back of her head into the wall,

Cotton fights the urge to stop her. He concentrates on reciting the passage from the Bible.

Finally, Nell collapses in a heaving, sweaty mass on the floor. Cotton keeps reciting...

JUMP CUT TO:

Nell looks pale, in shock. Cotton is setting her fingers as Tracey holds her. Nell isn't struggling at the moment, though. She seems herself

JUMP CUT TO:

Nell is curled up in the corner, half-turned away from us. Cotton sits nearby. The boxers between rounds.

CONTINUED: (5)

COTTON
Nell... Nell, are you ready to talk to me?

She doesn’t answer. The camera moves around to be able to see Nell’s face.

COTTON (O.S.) (cont’d)
Alright, if I can’t talk to Nell, I’ll talk to Abalam. So tell us- tell us, demon, why have you come here?

The camera is now looking into Nell’s face and we can now see: <u>one of Nell’s eyes has independently drifted off-center</u>, making her look disturbingly deranged.

COTTON (cont’d)
Why Nell? Why her? Tell us...

Nell slowly rises, starts to walk away.

COTTON (cont’d)
You can’t hide any more. I’m calling you out.

Nell stops in the middle of the room. She starts screaming and drops to her knees.

Cotton goes to her. Reaches out to touch her shoulder. This time she doesn’t attack him. She just curls up in a ball.

JUMP CUT TO:

Cotton kneels beside Nell, whispering soothingly to her. Suddenly, she rears up. She looks frightened. Tears fill her eyes. She seems to be trying to form words over the tightness in her throat.

COTTON (cont’d)
What?

NELL
Please forgive me... please.

COTTON
Forgive you? Forgive you for what?

NELL
Forgive me for letting *him* love me.

Cotton knows he’s getting somewhere. He presses calmly--

CONTINUED: (6)

COTTON
Who? Who loved you?

Nell shakes her head as if she can’t dare to say the words.

COTTON
It’s alright. Tell me. Just me.

Cotton leans forward. She whispers into his ear. We can’t make out words, just a sibilant stream of syllables-- punctuated by the occasional giggle-- that is an eeriely, uncomfortably sensual. Discomfort shows in Cotton’s face...

Slowly, he-- and we-- become aware that Nell is touching herself as she speaks...

As Cotton tears free of her grip, Nell’s strange, little Molly Bloom-type soliloquoy becomes audible.

NELL
...and he made an altar of my body and he worshipped me with his fingers and his tongue...

COTTON
Stop it.

NELL
(grinding sensually)
I was split in two... split in three in four...

COTTON
Stop it. Now.

NELL
(looking at him)
You can do anything you want to me. Right here. I’ll do things to *you.* I know how to do things. He taught me how to do things...

Cotton looks off-camera for some help from Tracey. As she starts to come into frame, Nell reaches out and grabs Cotton’s leg.

NELL (cont’d)
I’ll let you fuck me all over. I’ll let you give me a blow job in the ass...

Cotton is taken aback-- reality dawning on him. He chuckles. A reaction which takes Nell by surprise.

CONTINUED: (7)

COTTON
Do you know what a blow job is?

Nell looks flummoxed.

COTTON (cont'd)
Tell me, demon, Apostle of Satan, tell me- what is a blow job.

NELL
Fuck you!

COTTON
You don't know, do you? You don't even know what a "blow job" is, do you?

Nell turns away, muttering to herself under her breath. Cotton makes her look at him.

COTTON (cont'd)
You are not a devil. You are just a girl. You can't hide anymore, Nell. I know what you are. You're a confused and frightened teenage girl...

NELL
I am not.

COTTON
An innocent girl...

NELL
She wasn't innocent!

Cotton is taken aback. This is clearly Nell crying out.

COTTON
No? How was she not innocent?

Nell laughs again, but it's more of a dry croak than before.

COTTON (cont'd)
How was she not innocent?

NELL
She let me in. She desired me. Because she is filth like all of them. Unclean. She spread her legs for me.

COTTON
For you?

CONTINUED: (8)

NELL
I came to her in a Mustang.

Cotton is not at all sure what this means. He remembers the camera. He motions for it to cut. Has to repeat the gesture.

INT. LIVING ROOM -- DAY

Oliver looks unsteady as Cotton relates what he’s found out.

COTTON
She’s talking now. She named the unclean thing that impregnated her.

OLIVER
Abalam?

COTTON
Bobby.

A lot of odd looks at that.

COTTON (cont’d)
Do you know anybody by that name? Bobby? Robert?

Oliver shakes his head, not understanding.

COTTON (cont’d)
She says he’s a local boy. She says he took her for a ride in his car.

OLIVER
Impossible.

COTTON
A red Mustang. You know any local kids with a red Mustang?

OLIVER
That is impossible. I never let her out of my sight.

COTTON
She says she let this boy have his way with her and that’s how the demon entered her.

OLIVER
I never let her out of my sight! Never!

Cotton regards Oliver sympathetically.

BACK ROOM

A calmer Nell is telling her story.

NELL
He came to the house to deliver supplies a few times. Her father had to send for feed sometimes. Sometimes it was Mr. Parker who came. A couple of times it was Bobby. He was always nice. Polite. That’s how I tricked her.

Oliver, listening to this, looks at the floor. The muscles along his jawline tensing visibly.

NELL (cont’d)
He didn’t ask her to go for a ride the first time. Or even the second. But the third time, he asked... He didn’t have to ask her twice.
(smiles)
She was so easy. So stupid. He didn’t even have to lie to her about saying he loved or anything like that. She just let him. She just let him put it inside her. And she liked it. Everything he put inside her. Even me. She felt me swishing around inside her, my tail licking her insides, and she liked that too...

OLIVER
(jumping up)
This is not true! None of this is true!

Oliver stalks out of the room.

INT. LIVING ROOM -- DAY

Oliver is stalking around the room.

OLIVER
I never let her out of my sight. Tyler I let slip through my fingers. I was neglectful with him, but Nell-- I never let anyone near her. Never.

COTTON
That’s harder to believe than that she’s possessed by a demon called Abalam?

OLIVER
She would not have given herself to some... She would not have given herself.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

OLIVER(cont'd)

She was taken by force!
(screaming at Nell)
She was raped!

His vehemence takes even Oliver himself by surprise.

COTTON
Is that what you want it to be? Is that what you need it to be?

Oliver swallows with difficulty. He seems to be taking Cotton’s questions to heart. He sits down, hands on his knees. He looks at his hands.

OLIVER
There was a boy at Continental Feed. I guess his name was Robert. Robert Wool or Warden. Something.

EXT. FARMHOUSE -- DAY

Oliver, rather sheepishly, repairs the severed phone line.

INT. FARMHOUSE -- DAY

Tracey hangs up the phone. She addresses Cotton.

TRACEY
He says the kid’s name is Robert Wossner. He worked for them for about six months, until just a few weeks ago. They say he’s working at the Sonic in town now.

Cotton shakes his head, almost laughing.

INT. FARMHOUSE -- DAY

Nell is calm now. Her broken fingers have homemade splints on them. Oliver holds her.

A car pulls up outside.

EXT. FARMHOUSE -- DAY

Gerald arrives with Amaryllis and A TRIO OF OLDER WOMEN from his church. Cotton greets them.

COTTON
Thank you so much for coming.

GERALD
This is some kind of miracle you pulled off. Getting Oliver to open up like this.

CONTINUED:

COTTON
Well, we've all been through a lot this morning.

GERALD
Pardon me for saying so, you look like hell. Why don't you go back to your motel room, get a little rest.

COTTON
I got to admit that was kind of my ulterior motive in asking you to come over. I was hoping you could spell me a for a bit. Nell's resting now. I didn't want to rush to...

GERALD
No, no, I understand.

COTTON
Thank you very much. I was thinking, though, I could call your guy in Baton Rouge from the road. Bring him up to speed on what he's going to be dealing with...

GERALD
Sure, sure. He's Dr. Michael Hunt, the pediatric wing of St. Joseph's, Baton Rouge.

They head in, all smiles.

INT. FARMHOUSE -- DAY

Cotton stands by proudly as the truce he's brokered is sealed with hugs all around. Amaryllis sits down next to Nell, tenderly brushes her hair out of her eyes.

MOMENTS LATER

Framed by the den doorway, Oliver and Cotton get down on their knees side by side and pray.

INT. COTTON'S VAN

Cotton's at the wheel, heading north.

COTTON
That poor girl has a long hard road ahead of her.
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

COTTON(cont'd)

Odd’s are they’re going to treat her by filling her up with psychotropic drugs... How much better off does that make her? Who knows?

TRACEY (O.S.)
Excuse me, Cotton-- did you see? That was the Sonic we just passed.

COTTON
The Sonic?

TRACEY (O.S.)
The fast food place where Robert Wossner works, supposedly. We should do due diligence, right?

EXT. IVANWOOD SONIC -- DAY

FROM THE VAN--

Tracey goes into the place. Talks to the counter girl. A boy is called over.

IVANWOOD SONIC -- PARKING LOT

ROBERT WOSSNER stands against a wall in his Sonic uniform, except he’s taken the stupid hat off and twists it in his hands as he talks.

ROBERT
She said I’m the daddy, huh? That’d be a hell of a trick. That’d be one for the record books. I never touched her... I remember her. She was a nice girl, but I never laid a finger on her.

COTTON
Now, son...

ROBERT
You may’ve noticed-- or maybe you wouldn’t ‘cause I try to tone it down, especially at work here, but I’m gay as the ace of spades.

Cotton registers shock. Robert sees Cotton’s skepticism.

ROBERT (cont’d)
You can ask around. I don’t give a shit. This town’s done everything to me it’s gonna do... Also, I wish I could afford a Mustang. A red Mustang sounds nice.

CONTINUED:

COTTON
Still, son, you must have...

ROBERT
I barely even talked to her once, I only had like one conversation with her and Gerald jumped up my backside for *that*.

COTTON
You mean Oliver?

ROBERT
Who’s Oliver? I’m talking about Gerald.

Cotton looks dumbstruck.

COTTON
Gerald, the pastor of the Second Cavalry Church?

ROBERT
That’s how I know the girl. I met her there a couple of times.

COTTON
At the church?

The young man laughs like that was a joke.

ROBERT
Nah, his house.

COTTON
You met Nell at Gerald’s *house*?

ROBERT
I used to go over there sometimes. A lot of us did.

COTTON
For what?

ROBERT
Just to kick back.

COTTON
Was that what Nell was doing there at Gerald’s... “kicking back?”

Robert seems to know what Cotton’s implying, smiles cagily.

COTTON (cont’d)
Were there drugs involved?

CONTINUED: (2)

ROBERT
What do you consider “drugs?”

INT. COTTON’S VAN -- TWILIGHT

The highway races ahead of us. It’s getting dark.

Cotton’s punches a phone number as Tracey drives.

COTTON (INTO PHONE)
Yes, Pediatrics, please... I’d like to talk to Dr. Hunt, please... Dr. Michael Hunt... Yes.. no, I’m sure... Are you sure? Dr. Michael Hunt... thank you...
(hanging up)
They say there’s no personnel by that name.

TRACEY
Are you sure you called the right hospital?

TEDDY (O.C.)
Wait a minute. “Michael Hunt?” Mike Hunt?

Cotton gets it. It floors him.

TRACEY
I don’t get it. What?

COTTON
You never made prank calls?

TEDDY (O.C.)
It’s like Al Koholic.

Tracey repeats it to herself. Now she gets it.

EXT. FARMHOUSE -- TWILIGHT

Cotton’s van pulls up. All the lights are off.

The front door is hanging open.

INT. FARMHOUSE – TWILIGHT

Everyone is gone. Tracey returns from upstairs. She shakes her head.

Cotton stands, frozen, in the middle of the living room. He turns and faces the wall.

CONTINUED:

A heavy Manson family vibe: The wall is covered in weird, witchy graffiti, like what was in Nell’s room. Only a lot more of it. Filling the wall in patterned blocks of text, like concrete poetry. It looks like dried blood.

Panning around the house, we see there’s not a single wall untouched.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - TWILIGHT

Cotton looks toward the woods. CHANTING. BURSTS OF LAUGHTER.

EXT. WOODS - DEAR PATH - EVENING

Cotton makes his way along a deer path.

He stops. Listens.

Faint... in the distance, the festive sounds are now sounding more like some kind of folky plainsong chorus.

DEER PATH -- FURTHER ON

The camera’s light illuminates a rock that forms an island in the middle of the path. Something about it draws Cotton’s attention. His fingers the surface of the rock.

It’s engraved with cabalistic symbols, just like the graffiti in the house, only this lettering is very old and weathered.

The white truck they glimpsed earlier is parked near a clearing.

EXT. WOODS - CLEARING - EVENING

We hear that odd plainsong... The camera light turns off as it follows Cotton approaching the clearing...

It’s instantly recognizable as the place in the diorama in Nell’s room --the same configuration of trees, the same stone circle in the middle of the clearing.

Even more: the same HOODED FIGURE stands beside the stone circle with his back to us and the same THREE WHITE CLAD WOMEN kneel on either side of him, heads bowed.

It’s like we’ve suddenly somehow wandered into Nell’s make-believe world.

Cotton moves stealthily closer

Now we can see there are more people, about a few dozen people in all.

CONTINUED:

All dressed semi-formally, as if for a church potluck. They “sing” as they mill about, that off-kilter plainsong.

Nell is led in by Tyler and Amaryllis, each gently holds one of her arms.

The Hooded Figure-- Gerald we can see now-- comes forward and embraces Nell, seems to be offering her some reassuring words.

A FIRE springs to life in the stone circle.

Cotton shifts anxiously... the camera moves past him, trying to get as close as possible. Teddy aims the camera at the forest floor so that he doesn’t trip over anything... as soon as he does we hear Nell SHRIEK in pain... the camera’s light cuts out.

A moment of searching blackness, then the camera finds Nell squatting in the firelit clearing. Amarylis is stroking her perspiration-matted hair and whispering soothingly in her ear. The baby is being born.

Gerald is speaking in tongues.

Nell reaches between her own legs and pulls something tiny, wet and writhing out of herself.

Gerald comes forward hands outstretched and takes it from her. He lifts the baby high, as if he were offering it for veneration-- even though, oddly, all the others seem to be averting their eyes.

Gerald hands the baby to one of the church women. Before she quickly wraps it in a blanket, we catch a glimpse of something wrong-- in silhouette, the infant’s dangling arm seems too long and reedy.

And, for a second, it looks like there’s some kind of extra spider-leg like appendage.

The group lines up and each takes a turn kissing the baby.

Tyler takes the baby and holds it for a long while. He hugs it warmly and then hands it to the next person in line.

A LOW RUMBLE...

Shakes the ground.

Gerald looks toward the woods. He motions his group to begin exiting.

Suddenly...

CONTINUED: (2)

Another ROAR. Louder than the first.

The followers begin to trail away.

HEAVY FOOTFALLS come from the woods.

The camera now ZOOMS IN on the woods, PANS along trees, searching for what’s making that noise...

What happens next is chaotic blur-- Cotton has broken from his hiding place and is rushing into the clearing... Gerald and the others are continuing their oddly calm evacuation...

A SHRILL WAIL. Coming from the woods.

The camera makes a brief, futile effort to find the source.

Cotton reaches Nell. There’s blood all over her.

From the woods...

SCRAPING

DRAGGING

Nell seems to be fighting Cotton, but just as a frightened, disoriented girl. Slowly, she relaxes in his arms..

The flames in the stone circle suddenly, spookily leap high into the night sky.

Holding Nell tightly, Cotton faces the fire

COTTON
Those that believe SHALL cast out demons.

The DEMONIC WAIL pierces the air again.

Cotton’s voice raises up into a preacher like rhythm.

COTTON (cont'd)
In thy name SHALL they cast OUT demons;
they SHALL speak with new tongues."

TEDDY (O.C.)
We have to get out of here!

Cotton raises his voice making it more commanding and powerful with every word.

COTTON
Father, in the name of Jesus, I COMMAND
this demon to leave us now.

CONTINUED: (3)

In the air, a flock of creatures fly through the tree tops, screeching horribly.

The RUMBLE comes again. Trembling the earth under us.

Our POV swings toward the woods, twitches left and right, scanning for movement... and all the while Cotton preaches to the trees...

COTTON (cont'd)
I stand before thee in the armor of my Maker...

Nell is crying and crying... We hear Tracey somewhere, whispering. It sounds like she's praying.

Now something seems to be moving within the smoke and flame... rising...

Cotton raises one arm toward the flames, his other steadfastly holding to Nell.

COTTON (OC) (cont'd)
I cover myself and this place and all within it with the blood of Jesus...

The *thing* in the flames rises now, right in front of Cotton--who refuses to flee or cease his prayerful exhorations.

We glimpse little more than a shape, a suggestion of bloated, distended belly and long, spider-like arms. Something definitely not human.

But definitely there.

Teddy runs. His camera filming nothing but the ground.

Cotton's booming voice can be heard fading in the distance...

COTTON (OC) (cont'd)
Bind up this demon, Lord. I call on the angels for to...

His voice is lost amid DEMONIC WAILS...

INT. COTTON'S VAN -- NEAR DAWN

A pale, visibly shaken Tracey addresses the camera directly.

TRACEY
(looks at her watch)
It's about 4 AM.
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

TRACEY(cont'd)

We’re waiting for it to get a little lighter then we’re going to go back in and try to find... whatever we find. But we took a look at the last bit of footage we just shot...

The camera pans over to the PLAYBACK MONITOR. Tracey presses play. The tape reaches the point where Teddy runs away with the camera and everything goes blurry-crazy.

She pauses the tape, advances it frame by frame.

In one frame, the blurriness is not so total. In one frame, something is captured. It’s indistinct but we can make out eyes, a gaping maw, the contours of an inhuman face.

The face of a demon, caught on tape.

The camera pans back to Tracey. She has no words.

TEDDY
What are you going to do with this?

TRACEY
Show it to as many people as possible... It needs to be our mission. Our life's work needs to be to take this to people. Everyone needs to see this.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

A different Cotton stands at the pulpit before a blank screen. Graver, a touch greyer. He looks like Raymond Massey or a figure from the Old Testament. He nods slowly to himself.

COTTON
Everyone needs to see this. Every man, every woman, every child.

The auditorium in front of Cotton is packed.

COTTON (cont'd)
What you are about to see is not Hollywood movie magic. It is not smoke and mirrors. It is not make-believe. Parents, if you have children with you, hold them close, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, holds hands.

The house lights come down.

COTTON (cont’d)
I want you to hold hands, all of you. I want us to form a circle in the dark.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

COTTON(cont'd)

Children are wiser than adults because they fear the dark. They know the truth we're all too educated to know. Bad things live all around us. Everywhere there is not Light.

With a shocking suddenness, a terrifying image is projected on the huge screen behind Cotton. It is a grainy blow-up of the frame from Tracey's film. The face of a real, live demon.

COTTON (cont'd)
Hold tight to each other, brothers and sisters. We are as Lambs before the dark, but there is One Who watches over us more powerful than all the principalities and dominions of Hell! One to Whom the most fearful harbingers of deviltry and disease, corruption and cancer are nothing but harmless wisps of shadow.

With a motion, Cotton banishes the image and the lights instantly come up again.

COTTON (cont'd)
I was a sinner. I was a user, and an abuser. God tried to show me his face, but all I did was spit in his eye. Then he shined a a blinding light into my eyes. A light that burned all the way down to my soul

Cotton has the crowd in the palm of his hand. Earl and Fiona beam with pride.

COTTON (cont'd)
I am not blind anymore. I can see very clearly. Too clearly. Agents of evil walk among us. They are in churches. They are in our own homes. They are in red states and blue states. In Chinese states, and Panamanian states. But we have the power to defeat them. Even the least of us. By the power given us by the lord, we can kick the devil's butt all the way back to hell.

Cotton kicks the air. The crowd roars.

COTTON (cont'd)
Any of us. Even a frail, broken little girl...

CONTINUED: (2)

Cotton holds out his hand... And now Nell joins him on the stage. A pretty, happy young girl in a pretty yellow dress. She carries her flute.

COTTON (cont'd)
Unmarked by her encounter with the minions of Satan. God be praised!
(to Nell)
Now I hear you’re going to favor us with a little tune?

NELL
If you really want me to.

The crowd laughs and goes “awww.”

MOMENTS LATER

The collection plate is being passed around as Nell performs a passable “Leaning on the Everlasting Arms.”

Cotton stands to the side, clapping along, smiling.

POSTSCRIPT:

Cotton Marcus has taken over the leadership of his father's church.

Fiona Marcus has accepted Jesus Christ as her savior, and agreed to give the children a Christian education.

In the year that has passed since the Ivanwood Exorcism, Cotton's ministry has seen a 200% increase in charitable donations.